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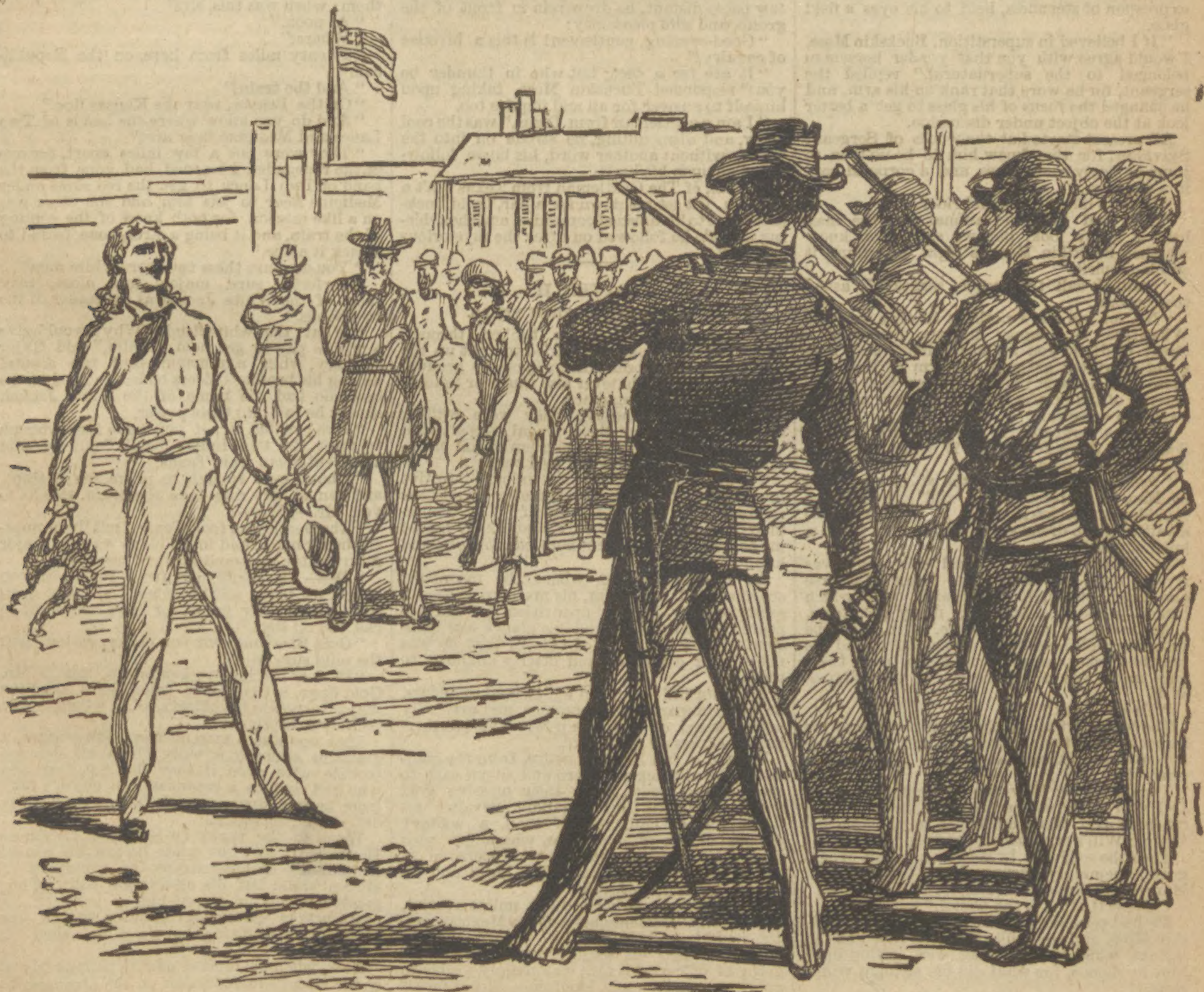
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Gold Spur, the Gentleman from Texas; or, The Child of the Regiment. THE ROMANCE OF A FRONTIER GARRISON.

BY COLONEL PRENTISS INGRAHAM,

AUTHOR OF "MERLE, THE MUTINEER," "MONTEZUMA, THE MERCILESS," "FREELANCE, THE BUCCANEER," "THE DARE DEVIL,"
"THE CRETAN ROVER," "THE PIRATE PRINCE," ETC., ETC.



"I AM NOT MAURICE SYLVESTER, BUT GOLD SPUR, THE GENTLEMAN FROM TEXAS."

Gold Spur,

The Gentleman from Texas;

OR,

The Child of the Regiment.

THE ROMANCE OF A FRONTIER GARRISON.

BY COL. PRENTISS INGRAHAM,
AUTHOR OF "MERLE, THE MUTINEER," "MON-
TEZUMA, THE MERCILESS," "CAPTAIN
KYD," "DARKIE DAN," ETC.

CHAPTER I.

THE PRAIRIE PHANTOM.

"It are a spook or a sperrit, or I are a liar!"

The speaker was a buckskin-clad frontiersman, and he stood in the border of a "timber island," gazing out upon the rolling prairie, which spread away like the limitless ocean upon all sides until land and sky met in the far distance.

In the timber was a bivouac of cavalry, the horses standing as motionless as statues, the troopers lying down upon their blankets to gain rest for the morrow's rough ride after the red raiders of the border.

Not a camp-fire gleamed in the timber, only here and there the spark of a cigar or pipe being visible, and heavy shadows fell upon the woodland scene.

But out upon the prairie the moon shed its mellow radiance from a cloudless sky, lighting up the landscape afar off, and causing the prowling wolf and the chirping insects to vent their delight at the beauty of the night in howl and song.

In the border of the timber stood a group of men, gazing out upon the moonlit prairie, and evidently attracted by some object other than a buffalo or skulking coyote that had come within range of their vision.

There were in the group several buckskin-clad bordermen, and from the lips of one of these came the remark that opens this story.

The others were men in uniform, and one of them, a tall man with commanding form and a bearded, bronzed face, that wore a habitual expression of sternness, held to his eyes a field glass.

"If I believed in superstition, Buckskin Mose, I would agree with you that yonder horseman belonged to the supernatural," replied the sergeant, for he wore that rank on his arm, and he changed the focus of his glass to get a better look at the object under discussion.

All present started at the words of Sergeant Sylvester, for they knew him to be no man to jump at hasty conclusions, and a corporal said in a whisper:

"It looks like a horse and rider."

"Yes, and both the animal and the man have a misty look, but we shall soon know whether Buckskin Mose is right in calling it spook or spirit."

"Shall I call the major, sergeant?" asked the corporal.

"No, for we have nothing to fear, and the What-is-it is coming directly here and—Great God! do you all hear that?" and Sergeant Sylvester grasped the arm of Buckskin Mose with a power that made even that hardy veteran of the prairie wince with pain and answer in a whisper:

"I does, sergeant; it are ther cry of ther Southern Whip-o-Will, an' it comes from the lips o' yonder sperrit."

"Wait and listen!" was the stern command of Maurice Sylvester, and still grasping the shoulder of Buckskin Mose, he stood like one awaiting some dread sound that would prove a knell of death.

In silence all listened, and every eye was riveted upon the snow-white forms of a horse and rider out upon the prairie, and which looked, in the moonlight, like misty phantoms.

An instant of intense silence, when even the prowling wolf ceased its dismal howl, and the prairie cricket its piercing chirp, and then, once more was heard the cry of the Whip-o-Will.

"Twice! hark!"

The words broke sternly from the lips of the sergeant, and their utterance and his statue-like attitude, turned the eyes of his comrades upon him.

Then in silence they stood watching, waiting, and with a superstitious awe and dread of evil creeping over them, until once more came the Whip-o-Will's cry floating over the prairie.

Then the spell was broken by a groan of anguish, seemingly wrung from the heart of Maurice Sylvester, and the words:

"Great God! it is the signal."

He had released his iron-like gripe upon Buckskin Mose, and stood like one gone dazed for an instant, while his comrades were gazing upon him in silence, for what did his strange words mean?

"The speerit are comin' ag'in."

All started as Buckskin Mose spoke, and turned their eyes again upon the misty forms upon the prairie, and which again seemed float-

ing, rather than walking, toward the timber island.

"No! no! no! he must not come here. Quick, Caspar, my horse, and I will run him down, be he spook or devil," cried the sergeant, and the soldier addressed darted into the recesses of the timber to obey the order of his superior, while Buckskin Mose said firmly:

"I are with yer, s'argint, ef it's ghost-huntin', fer I never yit run down a critter o' thet kind."

"No, Mose, I go alone on this trail; and besides, your old Rattlebones couldn't keep pace with my horse," answered the sergeant.

"Rattlebones are lightnin', s'argint, when he gits up steam, and—"

"I say no! Ah, Caspar, thank you! Good-by, comrades all!" and with a light spring Maurice Sylvester threw himself into his saddle and dashed away like an arrow from the bow, directly toward the phantom-like objects on the prairie.

Breathlessly his comrades watched his course, heard once more the wailing cry of the Whip-o-Will, and then beheld the Prairie Phantom turn and speed away like the wind, until pursued and pursuer were lost to sight in the distance.

"Waal, thet do beat all thunder," said Buckskin Mose, as the sergeant's form disappeared from sight.

"I will report it to the captain, and see what he makes of it," answered the corporal.

"Hold on, for the sergeant is coming back," cried a soldier, whose quick eye had caught sight of a dark object far off on the prairie.

All eyes were at once turned in the direction indicated by the cavalryman, and Buckskin Mose said slowly:

"That are not ther s'argint, pards, or he hev turned ghost too, fer thet fellow are a mile from whar they went out o' our sight."

"You are right, Mose; but whoever it is, he is coming on rapidly," answered the corporal.

"Waal, ef it's a sperrit too, it are ther ghost o' a nigger an' a mule, fer them thar comin' is both dark-colored; by hunky! they are."

Eagerly all watched the coming forms of horse and rider, and in silence others joined the group, until two score troopers were gathered there gazing out upon the prairie.

Nearer and nearer at a swift gallop came the horseman, until, unchallenged by the sentinel a few paces distant, he drew rein in front of the group, and said pleasantly:

"Good-evening, gentlemen! is this a bivouac of cavalry?"

"It are fer a fact; but who in thunder be you?" responded Buckskin Mose, taking upon himself to answer for all and inquire too.

"I am a gentleman from Texas," was the cool reply, and dismounting, he strode on into the timber without another word, his horse following close upon his heels.

"Waal, ef The Gentleman from Texas ain't a cool 'un, jist set me down fer a liar," said Buckskin Mose to his amazed comrades, and shouldering his rifle he followed on after the mysterious stranger.

CHAPTER II.

THE GENTLEMAN FROM TEXAS.

In an open space of the timber, through which the moonbeams struggled to light up the scene, sat half a dozen officers upon the ground, their saddles, or whatever else was near to form a comfortable resting-place.

Smoking and chatting, they were whiling away the hour after their frugal supper, until worn-out nature would urge them to roll themselves in their blankets and seek rest.

Toward this group, with a seemingly intuitive knowledge of their presence there the mysterious stranger, who had called himself "The Gentleman from Texas," walked, and suddenly halted in their midst, his patient horse standing behind him.

As he stood there, where the moonlight streamed full upon him, his presence caused a sensation, for like an apparition he had appeared in their midst, and one glance was sufficient to show the group of officers that he was not of their command and utterly unknown to them.

A man of tall form, and with broad shoulders, he was commanding in presence, and evidently one possessed of immense power and panther-like quickness of movement.

Dressed in full Mexican attire, from the gold-embroidered black sombrero and silken sash to the Lancero boots, with their massive gold spurs, he looked like a gallant cavalier attired for a ball, rather than a solitary roamer of the wild prairies, where few men dare go alone; but that he was prepared to meet danger, the pearl-handled knife and revolvers in his belt proved.

Other weapons he carried not, unless a lariat, swung to the immense horn of his Mexican saddle, could be called such.

As he raised his sombrero politely to the group of officers, his face was plainly visible to every eye, and a noble, handsome, daring face it was, with features of womanly perfection and manly beauty combined, though it was utterly beardless.

His hair, worn long, fell in golden curls upon

his massive shoulders, giving him, to a casual observer, an almost effeminate look, which his small hands and feet added to, for a woman might have been proud of their diminutive size.

"Good-evening, gentlemen," he said, in a deep, rich voice, removing his sombrero as he spoke.

"Will you kindly inform me which of you is the commander of this cavalry squadron?"

Nearly every officer arose to his feet at his words, for there was that in the appearance of the stranger to command respect, and a wiry officer of small stature and middle age said politely:

"I have that honor, sir; I am Major Giles Gregory, and I beg to know whom it is I address?"

"On the Southern plains, major, I am called Gold Spur; in drifting northward through Kansas and Colorado, I have won the name of The Gentleman from Texas; whichever suits you best, call me by it, please."

This reply seemed to create a peculiar interest among all who heard it, and the major said:

"I have heard of a person answering to that name and your description, who had a most deadly encounter in Denver a short while since: may I ask if you are the one?"

"I am; several desperadoes took a fancy to quarrel with me, and it terminated unpleasantly for them," was the cool reply, and uttered in no tone of braggadocio.

"Egad! I should think so, when you dropped four out of the five dead in their tracks, and threw the other out of a window; but may I ask to what circumstance I am indebted for the honor of your visit to our camp?"

"I am heading for the garrison on the Platte, and striking the trail of two shod horses I followed it, to come upon a precious pair of renegade whites, disguised as Indians, discussing an attack that was to be made upon an emigrant train coming up from Kansas, by Two Lance, and a band of warriors."

"I had crept near the two, as they halted to rest under the river bank, and heard their plot to join forces, for one of them was from the band of Medicine Bear, and I also learned of your presence in this timber island, from what was said, so came to inform you."

"The renegade hounds! I wish you had killed them; when was this, sir?"

"At noon."

"Where?"

"Twenty miles from here, on the Republican."

"And the train?"

"On the Beaver, near the Kansas line."

"And do you know where the bands of Two Lance and Medicine Bear are?"

"They were but a few miles apart, for one of the renegades, I learned, had gone from the band of Two Lance to get the red-skins under Medicine Bear to join him, and the other was on a like mission, for both knew of the coming of the train, and it being a strong one, feared to attack it alone."

"You are sure these two were white men?"

"Perfectly sure, major; and more, they spoke of the White Jackal as the leader of the two bands."

"What! that white fiend? Why I would give a year's pay to get hold of him," said Major Gregory, while a murmur that ran around among his brother officers boded no good to the one who had the name of the White Jackal, should he fall into their power.

"It is possible, sir, if you have force enough to meet the two Indian bands," quietly said The Gentleman from Texas.

"I have men enough to make the attempt, and can at any rate save the train, thanks to you, Mr.—, Mr.—"

"The Gentleman from Texas," mildly prompted the stranger, and in his blunt way the major returned the uncomplimentary response:

"D— The Gentleman from Texas! do you expect me to say all that when I speak to you? Give me another name, for life's too short to call you all that."

"Gold Spur may suit you better, major," was the mild suggestion.

"It does decidedly: gentlemen, this is Mr. Gold Spur, a Gentleman from Texas," and the major turned to his officers, all of whom bowed politely excepting one.

That one was a man of herculean stature, a giant in strength, a bully whom all shunned trouble with, even if they did not fear, and who had risen to a commissioned officer's rank from having done several daring acts really deserving promotion.

When in the ranks he had been known as Hercules Hiram; but when he got his second lieutenant's shoulder-straps, he registered as Hiram Hale; but his association with refined gentlemen had not caused him to leave off his coarseness of speech and manner, and he was often most insulting to those he called his friends.

Now, when his brother officers politely bowed at the major's introduction of the stranger, he arose to his feet, and said in his hoarse, insolent way:

"When a man advertises himself as a gentleman, I doubt his claim to the title, so you will

excuse me, major, if I decline to know the fellow."

"By the starry heaven! but that speech shall make you acquainted," came in ringing tones from The Gentleman from Texas, and with a bound he confronted the Hercules, out from his shoulder shot his right fist, and the huge bully fell in his tracks as though he had been struck with a sledge-hammer.

Then, before any one could interfere, the stranger had his small foot upon the throat of the prostrate man, and with a revolver muzzle at his head said sternly:

"Retract that, sir, or I will kill you."

"I can do nothing else when you have me at disadvantage," growled the surprised and really alarmed officer.

"You retract then?"

"I do," was the surly response.

"Enough! see that you need no further introduction," and removing his foot the stranger stepped back, the admiration of the group of officers, not one of whom sympathized with the crestfallen Hercules.

But those who knew Hiram Hale felt that the seed of a bitter feud had been sown that night, from which he would reap a rich harvest of revenge for the humiliation that had been cast upon him.

"Lieutenant Hale, as you have been most promptly and thoroughly punished, for the insult offered toward one whom I presented to you, I will not report the affair; but see that this matter ends here, sir," said Major Gregory, as the discomfited lieutenant arose to his feet, and with some low, muttered reply walked away, just as Buckskin Mose, who had stood in the shadow and seen all, stepped forward and said: "Stranger pard, put it thar, for you is lightnin' turned loose on a rackit, an' ef you is a specimen copy o' ther gents from Texas, I'll go thar an' marry a gal, so I will."

A general laugh followed the scout's remark, and the stranger warmly grasped his hand, while several flasks were produced, and a toast drank all round to—

"Gold Spur, The Gentleman from Texas."

CHAPTER III. BROUGHT TO BAY.

As the night wore on, one by one the officers and their men, bivouacked in the timber, wrapped their blankets around them and sought repose, but many not to find sleep came to their eyelids, for the corporal and others had reported the strange, phantom-like forms of a horse and rider seen upon the prairie, and the strange words and conduct of Sergeant Maurice Sylvester who had started in pursuit.

Who and what was the ghostly form, and why had not the sergeant returned?

These questions officers and men asked themselves, over and over again, and with no intelligent response framing itself in their minds.

The courage of the sergeant none could doubt, any more than his stern devotion to duty, but then why his strange words, and seeming recognition of a mysterious signal?

The major, worried more than he cared to admit by the circumstance, questioned his strange visitor, the man from Texas, but he knew nothing of it more than he had heard from the lips of the corporal and Buckskin Mose, but seeing that the commander was really greatly exercised about the affair, he volunteered to go in search of Sergeant Sylvester.

"No, no, for it would be impossible to follow his trail to-night, or I would send scouts after him; he knows where we are encamped, and if he returns after we leave here he can follow us, for he is a good plainsman," said the major.

"Still he may need aid and I will go, for my horse is as fleet as a bird, and is not tired, while I care not for rest."

"I will join you on the Republican to-morrow, major, if nothing happens," and several minutes after the stranger rode out of camp, and soon disappeared in the distance.

"I guess you made a mistake, major, in letting that fellow go."

The major turned quickly to find Lieutenant Hale, The Hercules, standing near.

"Why so, Hale?" he asked quickly.

"He may be the White Jackal himself," was the sinister retort.

"Great God! Hale, would you believe that of the man?" cried Major Gregory with a foreboding at his heart.

"Who knows? The White Jackal, they say, is given to many disguises and strange freaks of daring and tampering with his life."

"That is true; I will send after him a score of troopers under Rockwell."

"No, let me go alone, for you know my horse, major."

"As you please, but you already know he is no man to trifle with, Hale," remarked the commander, significantly.

"I shall not forget that, sir, for I am not one to forget or forgive; but do you go to the Republican, as he advised?"

"Yes."

"Beware of a trap."

"I'll risk it."

"Then I will look for you there, and if I

bring back with me the White Jackal, you may find that he is also *The Gentleman from Texas*," sneered The Hercules, and with a simple good-night he mounted his large and splendid roan horse and rode away in the direction in which the stranger had disappeared.

Major Gregory gazed after him for a long time, and seemed lost in deep thought, for he was recalling to mind the cruel stories told of a renegade white man, who with several reckless companions, had leagued himself with the red-skins, and urged them on in their hatred of their own race.

"No, Hale's hatred has prompted him to the assertion he made, for that man, with his face, as I saw it in the moonlight, cannot be the hideous monster whose red deeds have gained for him the hideous name he bears; ah! it is time we were on the march; bugler, sound 'boots and saddles,'" and in answer to the major's command the bugle notes, clear and ringing, startled the quiet camp into busy action, and ten minutes after a long line of troopers filed out of the timber, and wormed away over the moonlit prairie in the direction of the Republican, for, still trusting in the words of the mysterious stranger with the strange name, Major Giles Gregory was hastening to the rescue of the emigrant train reported coming up from Kansas.

It was just daylight when they came upon a large and fresh trail, and all knew it to be Indians upon the march, and they were heading toward the point where The Gentleman from Texas had said they intended to ambush the train.

Rapidly urging their horses on the troopers soon heard ahead of them rapid firing and wild yells, and dashing over a hill they came suddenly upon a thrilling scene, for, in a valley below half a hundred wagons were encamped, and charging upon them from the timber near by, were bands of mounted warriors.

With right good will the emigrants met the attack, and the rattle of their rifles, the heavy tramp of the ponies, and wild whoops of their red riders made up a picture of awe-inspiring realism, and into which the gallant troopers charged with clashing swords and ringing cheers to mingle.

But suddenly, as they dashed forward a startling cry was heard in the clarion voice of Major Gregory:

"Great God! look there!"

All eyes followed to where the saber pointed, and a hundred voices shouted forth one name:

"Sergeant Sylvester!"

"Yes, a deserter and a renegade! take him dead or alive!" was the cry of the officers, and madly the troopers rushed upon the Indian band, in the midst of whom was seen the tall form of the sergeant, mounted upon his well-known bay.

In among the red warriors charged the troopers, and unexpected an attack from so willing and warlike a foe, they turned their ponies in wild flight, unheeding the stern calls of their chiefs.

But a pistol-shot from a trooper brought down the noble bay, and Maurice Sylvester fell heavily to the earth, and ere he could rise to his feet, his own captain, Riley Rockwell, held a pistol to his heart, and cried sternly:

"Sergeant Sylvester, you are a prisoner."

"I submit, sir," was the low reply, as the haughty head was bowed upon the broad breast, and a moment after he was securely bound, while in his ears rung the insulting epithets, from the lips of his comrades in arms:

"Deserter and renegade!"

CHAPTER IV.

THE DRAGOON'S DAUGHTER.

THERE was no more dashing soldier in the army, than Captain Riley Rockwell, and in the charge upon the Indian bands he had been most conspicuous; but the triumphant light of victory had faded from his eyes, and in them sadness only rested, as he rode into the emigrant encampment, with Sergeant Maurice Sylvester walking by his stirrup a prisoner.

In the shape of a crescent the emigrants had encamped, the ends of their train resting on a small creek, and within the open space were their temporary camps, and here were gathered the women and children, while the men had assembled about the wagons, which were used as a barrier, or fortification.

It was into this half-circle that Riley Rockwell rode with his prisoner, and the eyes of many a fair emigrant maiden rested upon the handsome face of the young officer with admiration, to then fall upon the pale, stern countenance of the sergeant, and wonder why his hands were bound behind him.

"Who is the leader of this train?" asked Captain Rockwell, riding up to a group of men and women, who were discussing the attack, and the sudden coming of the troopers that had saved them from the mercy of the red-skins.

"I am, sir, and in the name of all here I thank you for your timely aid, for we were little dreaming of danger here," and a man of soldierly bearing, with a dark, stern face, and dressed in homespun, stepped forward and confronted the officer, who replied:

"We were on a scout after the Indians, who had lately been troublesome in the neighborhood, and were returning to the garrison when we learned of your train being on the march, and an intended attack upon it; I am glad we arrived in time."

"And we all say God bless you, sir, for your coming; but are you from the Platte garrison?" answered the leader of the train.

"Yes, sir, and Major Gregory begs me to request that you will carry our wounded on to the garrison, and also this prisoner, as we must continue the pursuit of the Indian bands."

"Gladly, sir, will we serve you in any way; but may I ask who is the prisoner?"

"This man, Sergeant Maurice Sylvester, who deserted last night, and—"

A startling cry interrupted the speech of the young captain, and out of the group of women and children bounded a young girl, halting before the bound sergeant, and gazing upon him with eyes that seemed to read his inmost soul.

She was scarcely more than fifteen, and her face was exquisitely beautiful, and her form the perfection of grace and willowy in every action.

Attired in a gray dress that fitted her well, the short skirt displayed her tiny, shapely feet, while her sun-shade, falling back from her head, displayed a wealth of red-gold curls that the ivory comb she wore seemed to find difficulty in holding together.

"I heard the name of Sergeant Maurice Sylvester; where is he?" she cried in a pleading tone, seemingly addressing Riley Rockwell, but with her eyes fixed upon the face of the prisoner.

"I am Maurice Sylvester," was the low reply.

"You! You Maurice Sylvester! Then you are my father," she cried piteously, and springing forward she threw her arms around the neck of the bound man and burst into tears, while his proud head drooped upon her own, for no answering embrace could he give to her.

Instantly Riley Rockwell slipped to the ground and severed the bound hands, and the sergeant said with a trembling voice:

"God bless you for that act, Captain Rockwell, for now I can clasp my child in my arms."

Around her slender form his strong arms were thrown, and in silence they thus stood, while all present gazed upon them with the deepest pity in their hearts.

At last the sergeant spoke in a low tone:

"Yes, you are indeed my child, my little Sibyl, whom I have not seen for twelve long years; but why is it I find you here, Sibyl, away from your mother, here upon this wild border?"

"My mother is dead."

The reply came with a piteous sob, and it wrung a groan from the heart of the strong man.

"Dead?" he gasped, after a while.

"Yes; she died one year ago, and I at last found where you were, father, and came to seek you, to ask you to take me into your love, for I have no one else in the world, and mother told me to come to you."

"She told you to come to me?" he asked, in a hoarse whisper.

"Yes, father."

"Then she forgave me the past?" he asked, eagerly.

"Yes, father; mother forgave you all," was the low but earnest reply.

"Thank God for that, Sibyl, thank God for that," and the man drew the young girl to his heart once more, and his whole frame trembled with emotion.

At last he said earnestly:

"You did right, my child, to come to me, and from to-day I will devote my life to you; I will forget the past, and we will live for the future, and—Great God! I forget, I forget that there is no future for me, for Sibyl, my poor child, I am now a prisoner, under the double charge of being a deserter and a renegade to my own people."

Words cannot portray the agony with which the strong man spoke, and Riley Rockwell turned his face away to hide his emotion, for he had greatly liked and ever respected the brave sergeant.

"You a deserter, father? No, it cannot be," said the young girl, hoarsely.

"Alas! Sibyl, my poor child, no matter what feelings, what motive prompted me to do as I did do, in the eyes of my officers and comrades I am a deserter, and you are a deserter's daughter, and have come to have me bring disgrace upon your young head, and to see me die, for death is the penalty for what I have done."

"No! no! no! you shall not die!" and the maiden threw her arms about her father's neck; but they loosened their hold, and Elmer Gerard, the leader of the emigrant train, caught her as she was falling for she had fainted.

"My men are calling, sir, and I must leave you; but I give into your charge the prisoner," said Riley Rockwell, anxious to escape from the sad scene.

"He shall not escape, sir, and I accept the trust," replied Mr. Gerard, and giving Sibyl Sylvester into the hands of a tall, splendid-looking girl who came forward, he turned to the prisoner, who stood silent and with bowed head, and again fettered his arms as before.

CHAPTER V.

SIBYL'S OATH.

THE arrival of the Gerard emigrant train created quite a furore of excitement in the garrison of the Platte, over which Colonel Horace Eldred held command.

Other emigrants had come to the vicinity of the garrison and settled, but they had caused no undue excitement, other than to the sutler, who saw in them increased patronage and a corresponding enlargement of his profits; but the Gerard train seemed of a different material, for there were among them those who had occupied the highest walks of life, and whom adversity alone had driven from the marts of civilization to the border.

Prominent among these was Elmer Gerard himself, whose autograph willingly given to his friends, had resulted in his own ruin, and driven him and his brilliant daughter, who had reigned as a belle in St. Louis society, in comparative poverty to the frontier, to there seek a new home.

Whether it was the magnificent eyes of Esther Gerard, or the hospitable manners of her old father that lured the young officers of the fort to the new settlement, not far from the garrison, those who visited there daily did not make known: but certain it is that many a dashing young trooper had suddenly found life in a frontier garrison most enjoyable.

There may have been another reason for this disappearance of *ennui* among the officers, in the person of the young and beautiful widowed sister of one of their number, Edgar Emmer-son, a sad-eyed lieutenant.

His sister, Clarice Conrad, was almost a child-widow in appearance, and had come West with the Gerard train, to at once rival the colonel's niece Edna Eldred, and Esther Gerard, for three more beautiful women were seldom, if ever, seen together, and their presence in such close vicinage, caused blunt old Major Giles Gregory to remark:

"Three beauties and a score of young uniformed idiots to lay siege to their hearts, will raise the devil before long: mark my words for it, gentlemen," and he made the mess-table rattle as he set his glass emphatically down upon it.

"You forget that there are a quartette of beauties, major, for the sergeant's daughter, to my mind, is the loveliest of them all," said Adjutant Roy Taylor, twisting the ends of his long, silken mustache, and glancing slyly into the glass at himself.

"Yes, she, to my mind is a lovely girl, and from my inmost heart I pity her, poor child, for the court-martial will assuredly find her father guilty, and that will mean death," answered the major sadly.

"And what will become of her then?" asked a captain with interest.

"Why we will vote that she become the Daughter of the Garrison," answered the major earnestly.

"Say rather, Major Gregory, that we make her the Child of our Regiment, and then where we go, she shall go, and it shall be our duty to care for her," suggested Adjutant Taylor.

"A good idea, adjutant, and I will start the petition to-night to make her the Child of the Regiment, and we will all be her adopted fathers."

"About half will be her lovers, I'll wager, and then look out for trouble," growled a grizzly bearded old captain.

"Oh you are always predicting breakers ahead, Captain Barney," cried the major.

"You said there would be the devil to pay awhile since, and I agree with you, Gregory, for there are shadows creeping over the sun," answered Captain Barney.

"What shadows, captain?" asked the adjutant.

"First, you know that The Hercules accused that dashing fellow, who calls himself Gold Spur, The Gentleman from Texas, of being the White Jackal in disguise, and took his trail the night he left to look for Sergeant Sylvester?"

"Yes," chimed a number of voices.

"Well, Gold Spur's information that night saved Gerard's train, as we all know, and there's ill-blood between The Hercules and the Texan, and it will be some day brought to a climax."

"Yes, captain," said several.

"Well, first we are to have a shadow on the garrison in Sergeant Sylvester's death, for they'll find him guilty, and then comes the sorrow of his poor daughter; then will follow the flirtations of that pretty widow, Emmer-son's sister, and the colonel's niece and Miss Gerard, not to speak of the sergeant's daughter when she gets over her grief."

"Go on, Barney, we are all attention," said a young officer with sarcasm.

"Oh I'm going to predict, and then stand afar off and see the fun, young gentlemen," said the gray-haired captain.

"Well, what after the flirtations?" asked the adjutant.

"Trouble, for this Gentleman from Texas will step in and marry one of the girls over your epauletted shoulders, and so will that handsome ranchero, or cattle king, who has a ranch up

the Platte, and then bad blood will be engendered, and I'll find my predictions true."

"May the best man win, Barney, wear he buckskin, brass buttons or velvet," laughed the adjutant; but before response was made the door of the mess-room opened and Captain Riley Rockwell entered.

His face was pale, and his manner sad, and they instinctively knew the reason, for he was one of the court-martial trying Sergeant Sylvester.

"Well, Rockwell?" asked the major, breaking the silence that fell upon all.

"He must die."

"Poor man," said the major, and the words found an echo in every heart.

"And I am now going to tell him of his fate, and worse still, to break the news to his poor child," said the captain sadly, and he turned away to go upon his sorrowful mission.

But hardly had he half-crossed the garrison plaza, going toward the guard-house, when a slender form ran up to him, and cried piteously:

"Ah, sir, is it true that I have heard? Must my father die?"

It was Sibyl, the doomed sergeant's daughter, and her face was white and pleading in the moonlight, as it was turned up to the young officer.

"Alas! yes," broke from his lips in sorrow.

He had expected an outburst of passionate weeping; but instead, she drew herself up to her full height, and said in distinct, firm tones:

"He shall not die! at least he is guilty of no wrong."

"Alas! nothing can save him."

"I say yes: I am but a girl, but I swear that he shall not die, and God records my oath."

Without another word she turned and glided away, leaving the young officer gazing after her in utter amazement.

CHAPTER VI.

THE DESERTER.

"SYLVESTER, you are doomed to death!"

"So let it be, Captain Rockwell: I accept my fate, and, though doomed to death as a deserter, I shall die like a man."

The two, Riley Rockwell and Maurice Sylvester, stood in the guard-house, a log-cabin in one corner of the garrison plaza.

It was but a few moments after his meeting with Sibyl, and the young officer was deeply moved, for he had tried hard to save the life of the man, who had, before, been so respected by all who knew him.

It was a stout cabin, the garrison guard-house, and meagerly furnished, for a cot-bed, a table and two chairs were all that were in the room set apart for prisoners under serious charge.

From the adjoining room, where were some half-dozen soldiers confined under some trivial charge, was heard the hum of conversation, with an occasional low laugh, as though they cared not to have their merriment reach the ears of their comrade who they felt must die, for all anticipated the verdict of the court-martial.

For a moment a silence fell between the sergeant and his captain, and then the latter took several rapid turns across the room, and halting suddenly, said almost impatiently:

"Sylvester, in the name of Heaven! why did you, the last to be suspected of all men, of being guilty of such an act, desert and go over to join the red-skins, like the veriest white renegade?"

The sergeant turned upon his officer, and drawing himself up to his full height, looked straight into the eyes of Riley Rockwell, as he replied in firm, distinct tones:

"Captain Rockwell, at heart I am no deserter, and far from being a renegade; as I told the court-martial, I went to the Indian camp for a purpose, and that purpose I will not unfold to you even."

"But I was seen in the Indian band when you attacked them, flying before the pursuit of my own comrades, and, through the killing of my horse I was taken, and I accept my fate, without one reproach to those who condemned me to die."

"I tried hard to save you, sergeant, for I feel now that, if you would speak, there is some palliating circumstance in your act."

"Of myself I will not speak more; but, Captain Riley Rockwell, there is one I leave behind me to my comrades, for she is alone and otherwise friendless in the world."

He paused, for his emotions choked his utterance, and only by a great effort he mastered himself and continued:

"Circumstances kept me away from my child, and only lately have I found her; found her to leave her forever; but I will her to the regiment, Riley Rockwell, and as my comrades do their duty to my poor child, so may God bless them all; as they wrong her, or bring sorrow upon her young heart, so may God's undying hatred and curses fall upon them through life, and follow them to the grave."

He spoke with a vehemence of tone and manner that showed how deeply he was moved, and Riley Rockwell answered in a firm voice, and

at the same time grasping the manacled hand of the sergeant:

"Sylvester, the regiment accepts the trust, for I will answer for all, and your child shall know no want, and in one and all of us, she will find a true friend."

"God bless you, captain; now I die content, for my life has ever been shadowed with gloom; but tell me, sir, how long have I to live?"

"Three days, only, for you are to be shot at sunset on Friday next!"

"One word more, sir; may I see my child?"

"Whenever you wish."

"Thank you, captain; now good-night, and in the morning let Sibyl come to me."

He held out his hand and the young officer grasped it, and then turned quickly away and left the cabin.

"Oh, sir! may I see my father?"

Riley Rockwell started, as from behind the sentinel on duty suddenly stepped the maiden, having evidently been awaiting his return.

"Yes; sentinel, allow Miss Sylvester to pass and repass at will into the guard-house, and give the same orders to the relief."

"Yes, sir," and the sentinel saluted, while with a sob Sibyl glided into the cabin, as Riley Rockwell moved away, his head bent in deep thought.

"Are you not afraid to trust the girl, Captain Rockwell?" suddenly asked a voice, and a tall form confronted him.

It was Hiram Hale, The Hercules, and there was a peculiar look upon his coarse face.

"How so?" abruptly asked the captain.

"I heard her oath to free her father."

"Ah! well, if a friendless girl can free a prisoner from this garrison, Hale, she is welcome to do so," and Riley Rockwell passed on to his quarters, in no pleasant mood, from some reason, with himself or the world generally.

CHAPTER VII.

THE RAY OF HOPE.

"My poor child, you know all," and Sergeant Sylvester turned to his daughter as she entered the cabin.

"Yes, and I have sworn that you shall not die, father," was the firm response of the maiden, to the great surprise of her father, who had expected a torrent of tears and a sad scene.

"Ah, my child, the court-martial have already sentenced me, and I have but three days to live."

"You shall not die like a dog," was the firm reply, and laying her hands upon the broad shoulders of her father, Sibyl continued:

"Father, let me talk to you of the past."

The sergeant started visibly, his lips moved as though about to speak, and then, without a word, he sat down in his chair and leaning his elbows on the rustic table buried his face in his hands.

"Father, let us speak of the past," repeated Sibyl, taking a seat opposite to him and leaning her arms upon the table before her, while she gazed earnestly into his face.

"Let the past remain buried, my child," he said softly after awhile.

"Not so, for I wish to know why you are this moment under sentence of death."

"For deserting to the Indians," he said, quickly.

"You did not desert; you simply went to their camp, and you were with them when the troopers attacked them; now tell me *why* you went there?"

"I cannot," groaned the man.

"You must, father."

"I will not, child; sufficient to know that I left my comrades, and was caught among the red-skins."

"It is not sufficient for me to know that, father, for I know more."

"What?" he asked quickly, glancing full into her face.

"The garrison scout, Buckskin Mose, says that you left the bivouac in the timber to follow a seeming phantom."

"Yes, yes; what else?" he anxiously asked.

"He says that this phantom, as some suppose it to be, gave the sound of a whip-o-will, and that you seemed deeply moved, and said that it was a signal, and then rode off on the prairie in pursuit."

"Yes, and what more?" eagerly asked the man.

"Alas! would that I knew more, for you were next found among the red-skins in their attack upon our train; now tell me, who and what was that phantom?"

Sergeant Sylvester remained silent, his head bent down, for he seemed to wish to keep his face from the gaze that sought his own.

Finding that he made no reply, Sibyl continued:

"Father, my mother told me that you had wronged her deeply, and then gone away."

"What that wrong was she never told me, yet when she died I sought to find you, and I did so, only to lose you."

"In the past I know there have been bitter sorrows in our family, and you, who was born to occupy a station exalted among men, I find an outcast from his name and home, and a non-

commissioned officer in the army; why is this, father?"

"Do not ask me, child."

"You will not tell me?"

"No."

She seemed deeply disappointed, and said:

"Then I am not to know why it is you have come to this far-away place to live, a common soldier only, where you should command?"

"That secret must die with me, Sibyl."

"Alas! that it is so; but do you know that I believe you have been more sinned against than sinning?"

He started at her words, and said earnestly:

"God bless you for those words, my child."

She placed her hand upon his, and said:

"Father, the whip-o-will is the crest of our name; it was the cry of that bird that led you away from your comrades, and now I ask you, who was it that you followed that night?"

"I will not tell, for I cannot, I dare not!"

"Ah me! you will not trust me, and I must act in the dark to serve you," she said moodily.

"What do you mean, Sibyl?"

"I have sworn to save your life, father."

"It is useless to make the attempt, my child."

"It is not," she answered firmly.

"Your words have some strange meaning."

"Yes, for you must not die."

"Alas! nothing can save me now."

"Father, do you wish to die?"

"No."

"Am I not dear to you?"

"Yes, dearer than all the world."

"One question more."

"I am listening, Sibyl."

"Are you guilty of the charge against you?"

"No."

"You did not intend to desert?"

"No."

"Something, what you will not say, called you to the Indian camp?"

"Yes."

"Had you not been discovered with the redskins you would have returned to the regiment?"

"Yes, Sibyl."

"But the secret of your going you will not divulge even to me?"

"Even to you I will not, Sibyl."

She gave a sigh and for a moment was silent and then she said:

"Could you prove your innocence if you lived?"

"One day it might be proven."

"Will you live to prove it, father?"

"Alas! I cannot."

"I say you shall."

He started at her earnest manner, and saw confidence in her face and he asked quickly:

"Sibyl, what do you mean?"

"There is one who says you shall not die."

"In Heaven's name who is he?" and the man sprang to his feet, greatly excited.

"Have you heard any one speak of one styling himself The Gentleman from Texas?"

"Yes, I have heard them talking in the guard-room about him, and they also speak of him as Gold Spur."

"Do you know him?"

"I never saw him, child, but what know you of him?"

"He says you shall not die."

"Ah, Sibyl, he is but a stranger in the garrison, and his words will hold no weight."

"His act will, though, and he bade me say to you to hope."

"What know you of this man, Sibyl?" eagerly asked the sergeant.

"That he is a splendid specimen of manhood, and when I looked in his face and heard him say that he would save you I believed him and took an oath that you should not be shot, for I feel strong in my determination to prevent it, and with him I bid you hope, father."

Without another word she arose and left the cabin, and Maurice Sylvester was alone with his bitter thoughts.

CHAPTER VIII.

A STARTLING METAMORPHOSIS.

THE three days rolled away, and then came the one on which Sergeant Maurice Sylvester had been doomed to die, and a gloom was upon all in the garrison, for the man, who had so suddenly fallen from honor, had been a favorite with all who knew him.

In the settlement, where the emigrants had pitched their homes the same sorrow-shadow rested, for those of the Gerard train remembered the bright, beautiful girl whose presence had brought sunshine to their midst, and that she had found her father but to lose him by a death most terrible, and for a crime most heinous.

The last day of grace the prisoner had refused to see any one, even his child, and had sat with bowed head, meditating upon the life that was drawing to a close.

Before that he had received a number of visits from the officers, and his soldier comrades, and his daughter had been constantly by his side to cheer the rapidly fleeting moments with her presence.

But, when at midnight following the second day she had left the cabin, she had requested

the sentinel to admit no one else, and the wish of the doomed man she had gone to the colonel and begged its enforcement, and in solitude and gloom the hours had glided by.

Motionless as a statue, his face buried in his hands, the sergeant had remained, refusing all food, denying admission even to the chaplain, and seemingly desiring to brood over his fate in silence and loneliness.

At length the roll of the muffled drums was heard, and following came the march of the platoon that was to escort the prisoner to the scene of execution, and become his executioners.

Halting before the guard-house the officer, Hiram Hale, entered and said bluntly:

"Are you ready, Sylvester?"

"I am," was the low reply, and the sergeant arose to his feet, drew his slouch hat far down over his eyes, and with bowed head, stepped out and placed himself between the guards.

Again the drums sounded, and, in the gathering twilight the procession moved toward the clump of cottonwoods on the river-bank, where was the burying-ground of the garrison's dead.

Behind them came those of the garrison who cared to follow the sad cortege to the fatal spot of execution, and, strange to say, upon the arm of Major Gregory, came Sibyl, the poor daughter of the condemned man, for she had insisted upon going, and not one had the heart to refuse her.

As if to be near her, some of the wives of the officers, and Edna Eldred, the commandant's niece, also joined the sad procession, which, with the beat of the muffled drums, moved out of the garrison.

At length the halt was called, the platoon placed in position, and Lieutenant Hiram Hale led the doomed man to the spot where he was to stand, at the head of an open grave.

In silence, with head bowed upon his breast, his hands hanging by his side, he stood, seemingly so dazed by his fate as not to care for a word of farewell to his daughter, or those who had been his comrades on many a field of carnage, and in many a prairie bivouac.

Rapidly the shadows of night were gathering, for already had the sun gone down beyond the prairie horizon, and, seemingly indifferent to the sad scene, where others stood in silent awe and sorrow, Hiram Hale moved about giving his orders with no tone of feeling in his voice.

At last all was ready, and the hoarse voice of The Hercules was heard, with no particle of sympathy in it:

"Sergeant Maurice Sylvester, forgetful of a soldier's honor, you deserted your regiment, and allied yourself, as a renegade, with redskins, and a court-martial has doomed you to death, and this moment is the last of your life, so make your peace with your God."

Then turning to the silent platoon of executioners, he cried in a loud voice:

"Attention platoon!"

"Ready—"

"Hold!"

Every heart present gave a bound at the ringing command, coming from the bearded lips of the man they had expected to see die without one word, and every eye was riveted upon him.

"Colonel Eldred, to you, sir, I address myself, and crave your mercy, for I am not Maurice Sylvester, but Gold Spur, The Gentleman from Texas."

The long false beard, that had so thoroughly concealed the face, was thrown aside, and with it the slouch hat, and upon his shoulders dropped his gold hair, and glancing upon all was indeed the handsome, daring face of *The Gentleman from Texas*.

CHAPTER IX.

THE HERCULES'S CHARGE.

To depict the amazement upon every face, when the man whom all had believed to be Maurice Sylvester, was suddenly metamorphosed into Gold Spur, would be impossible, for all stood in dumb dismay gazing upon The Gentleman from Texas as he awaited the answer of Colonel Eldred, his false beard and slouch hat in one hand, and the other resting in the breast of the coat of the sergeant.

At length Colonel Eldred, a gray-haired old veteran with a kindly face, found the power of speech, and said sternly:

"What does this daring act on your part, mean, sir?"

All listened attentively for the reply, the platoon still standing with their carbines at a "ready."

In the distinct, musical tones of Gold Spur came the answer:

"It means, Colonel Eldred, that I have reason to know that Sergeant Maurice Sylvester did not intend to desert, or become a renegade, though the secret of his visiting the Indian camp I cannot make known."

"Knowing that at heart he was innocent, with pity for his sorrowing daughter, I plotted his escape from death."

"He has escaped then, sir?" said the colonel sternly.

"He has."

"By heaven! he shall be pursued at once and taken, and you, sir, shall—"

"Hold! Colonel Eldred, first hear me: pursuit of the sergeant is useless, for he left his prison last night."

"Who was the sentinel on duty then, Hale?" cried the colonel.

"Private Farrar of I company, sir," answered The Hercules.

"He shall suffer for this, and—"

"Colonel Eldred, the sentinel on duty was not to blame, and is as startled at beholding me here, instead of the sergeant, as you are."

"I alone am to blame."

"And I, too, sir; but I could not see my father die," cried Sibyl, stepping forward.

"And you, too, are in this plot to thwart military justice," angrily said Colonel Eldred, turning upon the young girl, who answered, fearlessly:

"I would break God's laws to save my father from death, sir."

"The maiden, Colonel Eldred, acted but a minor part in the sergeant's escape, for I am to blame for it all."

"I, taking advantage of my size and form being like the sergeant's, and some disguises I carry with me for purposes of my own, told Miss Sibyl that I would save her father."

"To do so, I visited him with your permission, and caused numerous others to do so, and these visitors, in a measure, confused the sentinel on duty."

"Then I made the sergeant change clothes with me, and cut his beard off, while I donned his uniform and this false beard, and took his place."

"Boldly then he passed the sentinel, who believed him to be me, and mounting a horse I had secured for him, rode out of the garrison still believing to be me, while I, to keep up thoroughly the deception, refused to receive any more visitors, and even deceived you all to the very brink of this grave."

"Miss Sibyl simply aided me in the minor details, and I now surrender myself to you, sir, for what punishment you may decide my act deserves."

"You have done a most daring act, Sir Gold Spur, and what punishment you deserve, I will decide upon after a consultation with my officers; as for this young girl, she must—"

"Pardon me, colonel, but we have, by universal consent you know, sir, made this girl the Child of the Regiment, and I beg you that she be dealt with only in kindness, for, though she has offended military discipline, she acted from her love for her father."

It was Major Gregory who spoke, and the applause his words received proved that he had the sympathy of the regiment.

"So be it, major: Sibyl, our Child of the Regiment, has my full pardon for her share in this most daring and remarkable transaction; but, you, my Texas friend, need not expect to escape so easily."

"I am content to bide my fate, sir," was the cool response.

"As your appearance and actions, since you came to the garrison, in spite of the hiding of your real name, prove you to be a gentleman, I will treat you as a man of honor, and accept your parole not to leave your quarters—"

"One moment, Colonel Eldred," and The Hercules stepped forward.

"Well, lieutenant?"

"I before suggested to Major Gregory, that this man was other than he represents himself, and his carrying with him disguises, causes me to fully believe him to be one whom we all have cause to fear."

All eyes were turned upon The Hercules, and as he paused, Gold Spur remarked calmly:

"And who is it, sir, that you claim that I am?"

In a distinct tone came the order:

"Men, cover that fellow with your carbines, and if he moves, kill him in his tracks."

"Lieutenant Hale, you assume unwonted authority, sir," sternly cried Colonel Eldred moving forward, while Gold Spur never moved, or changed the smiling expression on his face.

"It is because I know what this man is, Colonel Eldred," replied The Hercules.

"And again I ask what am I?" asked The Gentleman from Texas in the coolest tone possible.

The answer came with savage earnestness:

"The renegade chief known as the White Jackal."

All present started, and every eye was turned upon Gold Spur; but he did not even change color, and said in his quiet way:

"Colonel Eldred, I am your prisoner until you discover the truth or falsity of this man's charge against me."

"And you, sir, when it is proven, you settle with me," and there was a dangerous light in the Texan's eyes as he turned them upon The Hercules, who smiled grimly.

"Under the charge of Lieutenant Hale, sir, I shall be compelled to place you under arrest, and if he escapes the sentinel on duty shall be tried for his life."

"Adjutant Taylor, issue an order at once for the capture of Sergeant Maurice Sylvester, and a reward of one thousand dollars for his return,"

dead or alive; come, Edna," and offering his arm to a brilliant-looking maiden of nineteen, he started on his return to the garrison, the others slowly following, and Gold Spur in charge of the platoon that had been detailed as the executioners of Sergeant Sylvester.

CHAPTER X.

A WIDOW'S WILES.

"SENTINEL, I would speak with the prisoner."

The request was in a voice of rare richness, and the trooper on duty at the guard-house door, saw bent upon him a pair of eyes that were exquisitely beautiful, and seemed to be the windows of a pure and noble soul.

A petite, graceful form, clad in a dress of soft texture that fitted her to perfection, a complexion as soft as velvet, and tinted with health, ruby lips, teeth of pearl, a manner strangely fascinating, and a voice of pathetic sweetness, and you have before you, kind reader, Clarice Conrad, the "child widow," for the officers already had given her that sobriquet.

Why this beautiful creature had come to visit the prisoner, a man charged with being the White Jackal, and believed by many to really be that noted chief and renegade, the soldier on duty could not fathom.

But he knew well his orders and that visitors were not allowed to see the one who styled himself The Gentleman from Texas, whatever he might or might not be, and he said with a salute he would have given a major-general, but with firmness:

"I am sorry, miss, but it's against orders."

"I am not a dangerous visitor though, guard," she said with her sweetest smile.

The sentinel felt that she was the most dangerous of visitors, but refrained from saying so, and replied simply:

"I am sorry, miss, but I cannot disobey orders."

"Not even for me?"

"No, miss."

"You do not think a woman like me could do any harm?" and she bent her most fascinating gaze upon him.

Bluntly came the answer.

"Yes, miss, women like you do all the harm in the world."

She laughed, a silvery, bewitching laugh, and answered:

"I was one of the train, as you doubtless know, that was saved by the prisoner, and I wished simply to say to him that I thank him for that service, and do not believe him to be the fearful monster that huge lieutenant says he is."

"I don't believe it myself, miss, and he will doubtless be glad to know you think kindly of him; but I cannot disobey orders, even for you, and I had to refuse the Child of the Regiment the same request."

"Ha! she has been here then?" asked the widow, quickly.

"Yes, miss."

"Why did she come?"

"To see The Gentleman from Texas, miss."

"Did she know him?"

"You know he is here now because he helped her father escape."

"Ah, yes; but you will not refuse me entrance?"

"I must, miss; but if you would ask the lieutenant, who is officer of the day, he would not refuse you, I'm thinking."

"Who is he?"

"We call him The Hercules, miss; but his name is Lieutenant Hale."

The widow patted her little foot for an instant as if in meditation, and then said, speaking more to herself:

"No, I will neither ask The Hercules, nor do I wish him to know that I came here."

"I won't tell, miss; but perhaps the colonel might give you leave."

"Ah! I will ask him," and away glided the beautiful woman in the direction of head-quarters.

She found the colonel seated in his private office, engaged in writing; but seeing who was his visitor he rose with a pleasant smile, for already had the charming widow bewitched him, and said politely:

"My dear Mrs. Conrad, this is indeed a glad surprise to see your sweet face in my dull quarters."

"I have come to ask a favor, colonel," she said in her sweetest tone.

"Granted before asked," he gallantly replied.

"I wish to visit the guard-house, sir."

"A strange request from so fair a mouth, but you may do so, and I will myself accompany you."

"No, I wish to go alone, colonel."

"Indeed! I warn you that you will find there only a few unfortunates."

"It is to see one of these I wish to go."

"May I ask which one?"

"The one styling himself The Gentleman from Texas."

The colonel started, and glanced suspiciously at her, for what could this lovely woman wish with a man whom he himself was beginning to fear was in reality the one The Hercules accused him of being?

"You are surprised, Colonel Eldred, and I do not wonder at it; but the truth is, I have heard so much of this strange character that I am anxious to gratify my woman's curiosity and see him."

"You can do that at his trial, for in a few days he will be brought before a military tribunal, as certain evidence is coming in that leads me to almost believe him to be the one whom we call the White Jackal, the most devilish renegade white man on the frontier, and whom I would give an arm to capture."

"I wish to see him now, colonel, for, to be frank with you, I believe I have seen him before, and I wish to satisfy myself on that point."

"Indeed! may I ask where you think you have met him before?"

The widow remained silent a moment, patting the floor with her foot, as was her wont when thinking, and then she said slowly:

"My husband, colonel, was a Texan, a ranchero, or cattle king, as you call rich cattle men up here, and when on his ranch I was kidnapped by a noted outlaw chief known as The Prairie Serpent, and in rescuing me from his power, Mr. Conrad lost his life, and I now wish to see if this Gentleman from Texas is not the same bandit leader."

"Assuredly you shall visit the prisoner, my dear Mrs. Conrad; but what excuse can you give to him for your visit?"

"Trust a woman for an excuse under any circumstances, colonel," was the laughing reply of the widow, and receiving the permit, she gave the commandant one of her most bewitching looks, and hastened away on her mission.

"Well, my good man, the colonel gave me the order, as you see, and she held forth the paper, which the soldier took and read aloud:

"The bearer has permission to visit the prisoner known as Gold Spur."

ELDRED,
Colonel Commanding."

"It's all right, miss, and I knew he wouldn't refuse you: just let me unlock the door for you," and the sentinel turned the huge key, and the beautiful widow stepped into the room.

A small, narrow window only gave light, and at first the widow saw only the outline of a human form, as the occupant of the room rose at her entrance.

But gradually her eyes became accustomed to the dim light, and she beheld before her the manly form and handsome face of The Gentleman from Texas, whose eyes were now fastened upon her with a look of intense interest.

Raising the veil which she had drawn down upon entering, the man saw her beautiful face fully, and started back with the cry:

"Great God! Clarice, you here!"

"Yes; and I have come to tell you, sir, that your doom is sealed, for you are in my power, and within the week you die."

The soft voice had changed now and had become hard and cold; and in the lovely eyes there burned a look of intense hatred, as she bent her gaze upon the man before her, and whose face had turned to the ashen hue of a corpse.

CHAPTER XI.

AT RAY.

FOR some moments after Clarice Conrad, the beautiful widow, made the fearful threat to the imprisoned Gentleman from Texas, the two stood gazing at each other in silence.

In the eyes of the woman there was a look of triumph, and some of her beauty had faded under a look of hate that brought hard lines to her face.

The man was very pale, and yet it seemed that the effort to remain calm caused the blood to leave his face, rather than through dread of a fate with which he had been threatened.

At last he spoke, and it was with a sneer:

"So you threaten me with death, Clarice?"

"Yes; and you will find my words true ere many days."

"I have been so threatened before, and yet I live," he said, with a light tone.

"Yes; Satan, your master, has taken good care of you; but the rope is now around your neck, and I hold one end of it."

"Oh, I don't doubt your willingness to put me out of the way; but I do doubt your power to do so."

"Are you aware of what you are accused?"

"Yes; that huge idiot in shoulder-straps calls me the White Jackal."

"Are you?"

The question was answered by a light laugh of ridicule, and it brought a flush of anger to the widow's face, as she said quickly:

"Suppose I can prove it?"

"You cannot."

"You will see."

"Go ahead, sweet Clarice, and do your worst, for I have no fear of you."

There was something in the man's manner that puzzled her, for he seemed strangely indifferent under the charge against him of being the renegade white chief of an Indian band.

"I came here for a purpose," she said.

"Your every act, look and word has a hidden purpose, Clarice."

"Would you know why I came to this prison?"
"To see me, doubtless, having in some way recognized your old-time—"

"Hold! breathe not that word here," she cried quickly, and with a show of anxiety.

"As you please; I certainly am ashamed of it," he said with biting sarcasm.

"I came here, sir, by the orders of Colonel Eldred, who knows that I was once the captive of the Prairie Serpent, the renegade Texas chief, to see if you are not that man."

"Ah! not content with making me out the White Jackal, I am also to be made that Texas renegade?" he queried, rather than answered with a sneer.

"You know that the Prairie Serpent disappeared from Texas a year or more ago?"

"Yes."

"You are aware that shortly after his disappearance there the White Jackal appeared on these northern plains?"

"So I have heard."

"You are known as The Gentleman from Texas, and you answer the description of both the Serpent and the Jackal, and—"

"By Heaven! now I see the drift of your meaning," he suddenly exclaimed.

"You were obtuse not to have sooner discovered it," she sneered.

"You mean that it is in your power to hang me?"

"Yes."

"If you say I am the Prairie Serpent, then I will be believed certainly to be also the White Jackal?"

"That is my meaning."

"And will be hanged as such?"

"Yes."

"Well, sweet Clarice, I do not care to hang under such charges."

"But no power on earth will save you, if I make the charge, for I stand well here, my brother being lieutenant and aide."

She suddenly checked herself, as though she had gone too far; but already he had caught her words, and said quickly:

"Aha! that *lapsus linguae*, Clarice, shall cost you dear: now I know that you, Clarice Conrad, are the sweet widow Conrad of which I have heard since my stay in the garrison, yet never caught a glimpse of."

"Your brother, I believe, is Lieutenant Edgar Emmerson, *aide-de-camp* to the colonel; ha! ha! ha! my beauty, you are playing your cards with a bold hand and have some devil's game afoot, I'll swear."

It was her turn now to grow pale, and her bosom heaved tumultuously with suppressed emotion; but she hissed forth:

"Whatever game I may have afoot you will not live to see me run it down."

"I doubt that, Clarice, for I am in excellent health."

"Sudden deaths often occur."

"True, and especially on this border; but I have no desire to die suddenly, and I will not."

"Will not is a bold remark to make."

"That may be; but I tire of this talk, so let us part."

"Not until I know if you will do as I ask?"

"And that is, Clarice?"

"You know the only request I have to make of you."

"Ah, yes; to sign certain papers," he said, thoughtfully.

"Yes," she eagerly answered.

"I refused once, and I will not change my mind."

"Then I will return and report to Colonel Eldred that you are The Prairie Serpent of Texas, who once captured me from my husband's ranch," she said, fiercely.

He looked her in the eyes without the slightest change of color, and said sternly:

"I do not doubt your willingness so to do, Clarice Conrad; but I dare you to make that report."

"You dare me?"

"Yes."

"You do not believe I will do it?"

"I defy you."

"You shall see what I will tell him," she said, in a tone of menace.

"And I too will sketch a picture for him to gaze upon, and which can be proven was painted from life."

"A picture?"

"Yes."

"I do not understand you," she said, in a faltering voice.

"You shall understand, Clarice, that my picture is of a sunny land, where a lordly home is embowered in myrtle and orange groves, and the scent of the magnolias floats ever upon the air."

"It is a moonlight night, and a man stands out amid the myrtles gazing into a brightly-lighted room."

"There are two persons in that room, and there is a tragic scene enacted there, and when the sunlight of the morning dispels the shadows of night, one of those two is dead."

She had sunk down as he spoke, and her face was pillowed on her snowy white and beautifully molded arm, and a cry broke from her lips:

"No! no! no!"

"Why, Clarice, what ails you?" he asked indifferently.

"I am not well: I do not feel exactly myself," she faltered.

"It were better for you if you were not yourself; but never mind, cheer up, and go and tell Colonel Eldred that you recognize in The Gentleman from Texas none other than the famous Prairie Serpent."

She made no reply, but motioned him back with her hand, and almost staggered toward the door, out of which she quickly disappeared.

The sentinel came forward and saluted, as he would to a superior officer; but bowing her head she walked quickly away, to start suddenly as she heard:

"My dear Mrs. Conrad, I was just going in search of you, being alarmed by your long stay."

It was Colonel Eldred, and, by the greatest effort of her will, she subdued her emotion, brought the color back to her face, and said in her sweet way:

"You were kind, colonel, to think of me."

"There are so many things said against the prisoner, that I really felt a dread of evil to you."

"You wrong him, as I have done; he is not the Prairie Serpent, nor is he the White Jackal."

"Indeed! how know you this?"

"I have met him before, and find he is a friend of my late husband."

"Thank God for this, for I really like the man; you have saved him, my dear Mrs. Conrad, and I will at once go and release him from durance vile."

She started, and said quickly:

"May I accompany you, colonel?"

Certainly, and he shall know to whom he owes his life. Come," and the colonel led the way back to the guard-house.

CHAPTER XII.

THE HERCULES MEETS HIS MATCH.

THE Gentleman from Texas gave a quick glance as he saw who it was that entered his prison, and he seemed about to speak, when the widow hastily said:

"I have brought the colonel to see you, Sir Gold Spur."

"I am happy to see Colonel Eldred," was the calm reply.

"Gold Spur, our charming little friend here, Mrs. Conrad, has led me aright regarding you, and I regret exceedingly that you have been cast under suspicion; but you know out here, we have to be careful with whom we deal, and your daring release of Sergeant Sylvester, certainly brought upon you censure."

"I am content, Colonel Eldred, as it is: Sylvester was innocent of wrong doing, I am assured, and I aided him, and am willing to abide the consequences," was the calm reply.

"Well, we will drop the matter, and I now release you from imprisonment, as Mrs. Conrad has taken from my mind all doubt of you."

"Mrs. Conrad is very kind," was the reply, and the woman recognized a sneer in the words, and her face flushed; but she said in her winning way:

"Recognizing you as one I had known in the past, sir, it would have been cruel in me to allow you to remain under suspicion of the grave charges against you, when a word from me would banish such suspicion."

"Mrs. Conrad's tender heart is too well known for one to doubt her doing otherwise," was the response, and again the woman recognized the sarcasm of the words, but remained silent.

"Come, Gold Spur—ah, by the way, madam, you did not tell me the real name of our friend?" and the colonel turned to the widow, who caught the warning look of the Texan, and answered with consummate ease of manner:

"Gold Spur the Ranchero," is about all I remember hearing him called, colonel, excepting also by the name of Scout."

"Ah, yes, a Scout too? Well, that accounts for his misty cognomen, as these bordermen seem to prefer a certain queer style of name to their own. Well, Mr. Gold Spur, I will give the quartermaster orders to furnish you with an undress army suit, as the sergeant has worn your very handsome Mexican dress off with him."

"Thank you, Colonel Eldred, I have another suit in my quarters, for I travel with rather heavy baggage for a horseman; I am then, sir, to consider myself free?"

"You are; but I warn you not to tamper any more with my prisoners, or even the widow may not be able to save you; but honestly, Gold Spur, I am not sorry that Sylvester escaped, for he is a man I greatly admired and respected, and his whole course, since he has been under my command, proved him to have seen better days in the past, and I cannot believe that he had deserted, while his execution would have brought a fearful sorrow and blight upon his beautiful daughter."

"I agree with you, Colonel Eldred, and I feel that Sergeant Sylvester will one day prove his innocence of intentional desertion," and with a

bow the Texan left the cabin, to be instantly halted by the sentinel outside.

"Let him pass, Caspar; the gentleman is no longer a prisoner," ordered the colonel, and the surprised soldier obeyed, though, as the Texan walked away, and the commandant and the widow slowly followed, he muttered:

"That's the work o' them handsome eyes, I'll bet my month's pay on it: well, women is queer critters, and the more prettier they be, the more queerer they are."

With this philosophical remark the trooper still kept up his monotonous walk on duty, though his prison was empty.

But suddenly he heard an outcry, and turned quickly to see one man spring toward another and seize him.

It was Lieutenant Hiram Hale, The Hercules, and The Gentleman from Texas who had met, and the sentinel distinctly heard the cry of surprise from the lips of the former, and what then followed.

"Ha! my jail-bird, you have friends here to release you, but I'll return you to your pen," shouted the lieutenant.

"I was freed, sir, by Colonel Eldred," was the calm reply.

"You lie!" shouted The Hercules, and with drawn sword he sprung upon The Gentleman from Texas, who was wholly unarmed.

Then a hundred eyes, and among them the colonel's and widow's saw the result, for Gold Spur met the attack more than half-way; the sword he held was seized and torn from his grasp, and then came a sharp snap as it was broken in twain and the pieces cast aside, and the gripe of the Texan upon the throat of his assailant bent him back with a strength that was irresistible and hurled him, giant as he was, to the ground with a force that would have killed a less powerful man.

Instantly Gold Spur walked away, continuing on to the quarters that had been assigned him upon his coming to the garrison, while Colonel Eldred and many others hastened to the severely punished lieutenant, who was slowly rising to his feet, his face livid with fury.

Seeing his commander he said quickly:

"Did you set that devil free, sir?"

"I released The Gentleman from Texas, Lieutenant Hale, and he has justly punished you for your insulting words which I overheard," was the stern response.

"You have set a man free, Colonel Eldred, who I can prove is the White Jackal."

"Bring me proof that he is such, Lieutenant Hale, and I will have him hanged within an hour after."

"I have the proof, sir."

"Show it me and I will keep my word; but if you cannot, I warn you to beware of The Gentleman from Texas, as with all your strength, you seem but a child in his arms," and Colonel Eldred walked away, leaving the Hercules to go on to his quarters after the proofs he had said he possessed, that Gold Spur was the White Renegade of the plains in disguise.

CHAPTER XIII.

BUCKSKIN MOSE STRIKES A STRANGE TRAIL.

WHEN Colonel Eldred rejoined the pretty widow, who had been a deeply interested looker-on of the scene described between The Gentleman from Texas and The Hercules, he found her pale and nervous, and said pleasantly:

"Do not be frightened, for there was no harm done, other than to have The Hercules know that he has met his match, and I hope it will prove a wholesome lesson."

"The matter will not end here, Colonel Eldred, for Herbert is not a man to take the lie tamely."

The colonel turned quickly toward Clarice and said suspiciously:

"Herbert? You do then know his name?"

She was equal to the occasion, for she answered with the utmost sang-froid:

"Why, is his name not Herbert?"

"I am sure I do not know, my dear Mrs. Conrad."

"An officer under your command, and you do not know his name? For shame, colonel!"

"Ah! you were speaking of one person, and I another; I referred to the Texan and not The Hercules."

"Hercules! ah, that is the name of the lieutenant, and he deserves it from his magnificent size; don't you think he will follow up the affair for having been given the lie?" and Clarice looked as innocent as a child.

"It was The Hercules who gave the Texan the lie; but I don't wonder you are confused, for it is no sight for your pretty eyes to gaze upon; but here we are at your brother's quarters, and I must leave you, for I see Buckskin Mose awaiting me," and with his suspicions, momentarily aroused, wholly allayed by the widow's manner and words, Colonel Eldred hastened on to head-quarters, where the scout was awaiting him, and, at the same time telling the sentinel, a recruit of recent date, some marvelous stories of red-skin butchery and torture of soldiers whom they captured.

"Well, Mose, as usual, demoralizing my

soldiers with your yarns, as I can see by the sentinel's face," said the colonel, pleasantly, as he approached.

"I was jest tellin' him, sir, about the red-skins, so that he'd be ust to the'r ways when they capters him," replied Buckskin Mose, innocently, as he followed the commander into his private quarters.

"Well, Mose, you are too good a scout to quarrel with, if you do frighten my recruits half out of their wits; but what news have you?"

"I hev jist come in off o' a trail."

"So I know."

"I don't like what I seen."

The colonel saw that Buckskin Mose had something to tell of more than ordinary importance, but knew that the best way to get at it was to let him speak in his own way, so replied:

"What you don't like, Mose, must be something disagreeable, indeed."

"I are a lovin' kind o' a human, thet are a fack, kernul, an' has ther disposish o' a Sunday school teacher; but thar be things as I don't like, an' sich I hes seen ter-day."

"How far did you go on the trail, Mose?"

"Down on the Republican."

"And there you saw it?"

"Yas, kernul, I did; an' what does yer s'pose it were?"

"I cannot tell."

"A man."

"Red, white, or black?"

"His heart are black, his face are white, an' I'm no jedge ef his hand hain't red."

"It must have been the renegade chief, White Jackal?"

"Nary, kernul, fer they do say he are heur, an' thet Ther Gent from Texas are he."

"I have proof to the contrary."

"I hope so, but things looks bad."

"What do you mean, Mose?" asked the colonel, impatiently.

"I means thet I seen Sergeant Maurice Sylvester at the head of ther band o' red-skins thet folloer ther White Jackal."

Colonel Horace Eldred sprung to his feet, white with anger, and cried:

"Buckskin Mose, do you speak the truth?"

"I hopes yer doesn't doubt it, kernul, fer ef yer did, I'd hitch with yer ef yer was ther President," and none who knew the fearless scout would have doubted that he would be as good as his word, for under his buckskin hunting-shirt and rough exterior, he had a heart that was all honesty and nobleness.

"No, Mose, I would not doubt you; only I fear you may be mistaken," said the colonel, apologetically.

"You hopes I is, kernul, but I isn't, fer I hes eyes as don't go back on me, an' they seen Sergeant Maurice Sylvester ridin' at ther head o' ther Dog Soldier Sioux band."

"Where were you, Mose?"

"On ther Republican."

"But where?"

"Up a tree, kernul, and durned ef I didn't want ter pull it up arter me when I seen 'em coming."

"And they passed near to you?"

"Within a lariat's length."

"And the sergeant was at their head?"

"He were."

"Dressed how?"

"In his uniform."

A bright smile crossed the face of the colonel, as he said, hastily:

"I was in hopes it was a mistake, Mose; but the sergeant, you know, changed dresses with The Gentleman from Texas."

"I knows that, but he had more clothes."

"But did he take them?"

"I'm thinkin' he did, fer he went off well fixed."

The colonel made no reply, but rung a bell, and an orderly appeared.

"Go to the late quarters of Sergeant Sylvester, and see what clothing he carried with him."

The orderly saluted and departed, and the commandant paced slowly to and fro, his brow clouded, while Buckskin Mose gazed in wonder at the little articles of bric-a-brac about the room, wondering what possible use they could be put to.

Presently the orderly returned, and made his report:

"Sergeant Sylvester took with him, sir, his horse, saddle, bridle, a pair of saddle-bags, his arms, and all of his extra clothing."

"Well, Mose, it looks as if the one you saw might be the sergeant, for he had several uniforms, as he was a very dressy man; but I hope there is some mistake, for I have always liked him."

"I saw more, sir, for I knows ther track o' his horse, and when they struck the river, he rode him to the bank and watered him, while the Injuns went further down the stream."

"And you examined the hoof-track?"

"I did fer a fact."

"And it was the sergeant's horse?"

"Fer Gospil truth it were, an' then I know'd thar were no mistake."

"How many Indians had he with him?"

"Seventy, fer I counted 'em, and two white renegades aside hisself."

"Neither of these two was the White Jackal?"

"Nary, kernul."

"You have seen the Jackal I know."

"I has drawn sight on him a dozen times, but somehow I don't fetch him, an' yer knows I are a dead shot."

"He seems to bear a charmed life, Mose."

"Guess ther devil hes charmed him, kernul."

"You know his band well?"

"I knows 'em same as a parson does Scrip-tur."

"And the sergeant was at the head of the band of the White Jackal?"

"You hes it, he were."

"Now, Mose, who do you think this Gold Spur is?"

"I has fears he are the Jackal."

"So we believed for awhile; but why do you think so?"

"I has followed ther Jackal's trail often, an' ther horse Ther Gent from Texas rides, makes ther same identical track."

The colonel started visibly, and again took a turn across the room.

Then he summoned the orderly.

"Go and ask Lieutenant Hale to come to my quarters at once, and, upon your way back say to Lieutenant Emmerson that I wish to see him."

"Now I shall know who and what this strange man is," muttered the colonel as the orderly disappeared.

CHAPTER XIV.

A WEB OF MYSTERY.

IN obedience to the order of his colonel, Lieutenant Edgar Emmerson first put in an appearance at head-quarters, the orderly not having been able to promptly find The Hercules.

"Be seated, Emmerson, and let me ask you a question or two, that may throw light upon a most unpleasant matter."

Edgar Emmerson was a man of thirty, perhaps, sad-faced, ever quiet in manner, and bore the look of a man who was ever haunted with an unpleasant memory.

Not at all like his widowed sister in appearance, he was also lacking in her vivacity of manner, and though not unpopular, was not a popular man with his brother officers.

He had been appointed to the army from civil life, after having been educated in the navy and resigned from it, from some reason known to himself.

The remark of his commander, and the summons to head-quarters, seemed to make him a trifle nervous; but he said quietly:

"How can I serve you, Colonel Eldred?"

"You know that this man, styling himself Gold Spur, rescued Sergeant Sylvester from prison?"

"I do, sir."

"You also know that upon a charge made against him by Hale, I had him arrested?"

"Yes, The Hercules—I beg pardon, sir—Lieutenant Hale accused him of being this famous renegade, White Jackal."

"He did; but your sister—"

"My sister, sir?" said the officer with a start.

"Don't be alarmed, for no harm has befallen her, only she recognized in this prisoner a man whom she had known in Texas, when living on her husband's ranch, and I wished to ask you if you also have seen this Gold Spur?"

"I have, sir."

"In Texas?"

"I never lived in Texas, colonel, with my sister: but I saw the man the other day for the first time."

The colonel seemed relieved, and after a moment of thought:

"You had an encounter with the Jackal and his band one day?"

"Yes, sir, down on the Little Blue, where I was scouting with my company."

"You saw him distinctly that day?"

"I did, sir."

"And does The Gentleman from Texas look like him?"

"In size they are about the same, sir; but the Jackal wore a full beard, and this Gold Spur is beardless."

"That is true; but I thank you, Emmerson," and the colonel's bow showed that the interview was ended, and with a sigh of relief, apparently, the lieutenant departed, just as The Hercules entered, his face flushed.

"You sent for me, sir?"

"I did, for I wished to have you give me the proofs you say you possess that this Texan is the Jackal."

"Do you recognize this, sir?" and the officer placed in the hands of the colonel a well-worn paper.

"I do; it is my order which I sent out offering a reward for the body, dead or alive, of that scourge, the White Jackal."

"True, Colonel Eldred, and read this, please," and The Hercules handed over a second paper, which, with marked surprise and anger the colonel read aloud, and which was as follows:

"\$5,000 REWARD."

"Whereas, Horace Eldred, Colonel U. S. A., and commandant of the Platte garrison, has issued an order, offering a reward of \$1,000 for my body, dead or alive, I now return the compliment five-fold, and will pay to whoever brings me his scalp the sum of Five Thousand Dollars, and in no way harm the one who places it in my hands."

"THE WHITE JACKAL."

"Head-Quarters Republican River."

"Where did you get this?" asked Colonel Eldred, with all the calmness he could command, when he had twice read it aloud.

"Buckskin Mose gave it to me, sir."

"And where did you get it?" and the colonel turned to the scout.

"I found it pinned up with a small red arrow on ther garrison gate, when I went off on ther sargint's trail," answered Mose.

"I approached, sir, as Mose was reading it, and he gave it to me," explained the lieutenant.

"Why did you not speak of this to me, scout?"

"Ther loot'nent asked me to keep dark, an' I did."

"Why, may I ask, Hale?"

"That I might follow up a trail I had in view, and I have now tracked that paper to the writer."

"And who is the writer?"

"The White Jackal."

"That much the paper tells itself," impatiently said the colonel.

"And it tells more, sir, for examine this, please," and another paper was handed to the commandant, who glanced at it and said:

"Well, it is simply a poem on the Texas Ranger."

"True, sir, and is signed by Gold Spur, The Man from Texas, and the writing is identical with that in the reward offered for your scalp."

"By Heaven! you are right, Hale; the hand that wrote one wrote the other, as any one can see, and I believe now that Mrs. Conrad has been deceived, and that your man is not only the one you say he is, but also The Prairie Serpent of Texas, who has lately disappeared from that State—Orderly!"

The soldier appeared promptly in obedience to the call.

"Present my compliments to the officer of the day, and tell him my orders are that he at once take a file of soldiers with him and arrest The Gentleman from Texas, and then put him in double irons."

A gleam of triumph shot into the eyes of The Hercules, at the command of Colonel Eldred, who he now saw was thoroughly aroused, against the man, of whom he had been so unwilling to believe aught that was evil.

Hardly had the orderly disappeared to obey his orders, when Captain Riley Rockwell came hastily into the colonel's quarters, and said excitedly:

"Colonel Eldred, I regret to make a sad report, sir; but your niece, Miss Eldred, and Miss Esther Gerard, who was visiting her, have both been captured by the band of the White Jackal."

Horace Eldred staggered back and leaned on the table for support for an instant; but recovering from the shock, he said in suppressed tones:

"Order every trooper in the saddle that can be spared, and I will at once go in pursuit of this devil incarnate."

"Major Gregory, sir, has already gone in pursuit, while I came to you for orders, and will overtake him."

"Do so, and I trust to Gregory and yourself to bring back those poor girls, and to punish that white fiend; well, orderly!" and the colonel turned to the soldier, who just then entered.

"The Gentleman from Texas, sir, is not in the garrison, but rode off toward the cottonwoods, where the ladies were captured."

"Hale, by Heaven, you were right! that man is the White Jackal: but I will follow him to the bitter end; to your saddles all, for I lead on this trail," and the voice of the old colonel rung like a clarion as he gave his orders to his officers, and sent them to their quarters in such haste, that ten minutes after, at the head of a hundred gallant troopers, he dashed out of the garrison on the trail of the Jackal of the prairie, as the renegade's band was called.

But hardly had they disappeared over a roll of the prairie when a horseman came galloping toward the fort from an opposite direction, and saluting the sentinel entered the stockade.

That horseman was none other than Gold Spur, The Gentleman from Texas, and his face was as cool and unruffled as a May morn.

CHAPTER XV.

THE WARNING.

WHEN Sibyl Sylvester, the daughter of the sergeant, who had so suddenly fallen from grace, arrived on the Platte with the Gerard emigrant train, she had refused the kindly offers of a home made her by Esther Gerard, and had gone to the garrison, where she would be near her father, to comfort him should he be condemned to die, to save him if in her power.

The room given her was in the cabin quarters of Colonel Eldred, and near the cosy suite of apartments occupied by the commander's niece, the lovely Edna, who was anxious to have the lonely girl near to her.

These head-quarter cabins consisted of a group of comfortable log houses, so arranged as to be under one roof, and here too widow Conrad was given a room, as her brother lived in the row among the bachelors of the garrison.

Without eavesdropping Sibyl soon found that she could hear all that passed in the colonel's private office from her room, and consequently she heard the conversation between the commandant and Buckskin Mose, and what followed when Lieutenant Emmerson and The Hercules were summoned and made their report.

Her heart sunk with dread when she heard the web of guilt that was being woven about The Gentleman from Texas, and she muttered to herself:

"He is not guilty, I know, but if he is, and they arrest him, I will rescue him, for he saved my father from death."

Eagerly she listened to all that was said, and with a sad heart heard the order to arrest Gold Spur, and then what followed.

Dismayed by the news that both Edna Eldred and Esther Gerard had been taken by the Jackal's band, and The Gentleman from Texas seemed certainly connected with their disappearance, she knew not what to think, and her brain in a whirl and her heart full of dread, she sat in silence awaiting the next scene in the tragic drama that was being played in the garrison.

Suddenly the sound of hoofs caused her to start, and she looked from her window to discover with amazement none other than The Gentleman from Texas, who had just ridden into the garrison, not half an hour after Colonel Eldred and his troopers had started in pursuit of the maidens and their kidnappers, at whose head the pursuers hoped and expected to find Gold Spur, in his true character of the White Jackal.

As the sentinel on duty had permitted the Texan to ride into the garrison without arresting him, it was evident to Sibyl that he did not know the suspicion cast upon him; but she knew there were those in the fort that were aware of it, and should he not be warned of his danger, he would be arrested and held to await the colonel's return.

Instantly she determined to save him, and stepping out upon her little porch, called to him to approach her.

Raising his broad sombrero, for he was again dressed in his handsome Mexican costume, he wheeled his horse and rode up to the cabin, and said pleasantly:

"Ah, my sweet Child of the Regiment, I feared harm had befallen you."

"Befallen me?" she asked, in surprise.

"Yes, for I was scouting round to get a little fresh air after my release from prison, and discovered suspicious signs of the Jackal's band, and shortly after beheld two ladies on horseback in their custody, one of whom I mistook for you."

"No, one was Miss Gerard, the other Miss Eldred, and the colonel and four companies have started in pursuit."

"The pursuit will be useless, had he the entire regiment, for strategy, not force, must save them from that devil's power," he said, earnestly.

One moment she gazed into his face, as if to read his inmost heart, and then she said:

"Mr. Gold Spur, for I know no other name to call you by—"

"The Gentleman from Texas," he interrupted with a smile.

"I prefer the other; but oh sir! do you know that a scout has come in and reports your horse track the same as that of the White Jackal, and—"

"I don't wonder at that, for he is shod with the shoes I took from the horse of the Jackal, which I shot," was the calm reply.

"And sir, the large officer they call The Hercules, and who hates you, has found a placard of the Jackal's offering a reward for Colonel Eldred's scalp, and it is the same writing as a poem you wrote, and left in the guard-house."

"Ha! there is some devil's work going on here," he said quickly.

"Indeed there is, sir, and Buckskin Mose the scout, says he saw my poor father at the head of the Jackal's band, and oh! it is enough to drive me mad, for they say you are that monster in disguise, and as you were seen going toward the cottonwoods where Miss Eldred and Esther were captured, they think you did it, and expect to find you at the head of the redskins!"

The Child of the Regiment had spoken hastily and earnestly, and her eyes had been intently watching the face of Gold Spur, and she saw that he flushed and turned pale as certain inward emotions moved him.

When he had heard all, he said:

"My child, I repeat, there is some devil's game being played in this garrison, and The Hercules is at the bottom of it."

"I am no more the Jackal Chief, than your father was seen at the head of his band, and I will prove it."

"But you are known to be suspected here, and some one will see you and arrest you, so go at once."

"I cannot leave until I go to my quarters for ammunition; had it not been for this, I would have followed the trail of the Jackal's band at once."

"Let me get what you wish, for you will be seen and recognized, and you leave the garrison at once."

"I do not fear them, and—"

"But if you are under arrest you can do nothing; you saved my father, that he might prove his innocence, so now go, for free, you can do the same."

"You are a sweet little pleader, and I will obey; my saddle-pockets, haversack, and *serape*, all are in the room I occupied in "I" cabin; please bring them to me here, if you think it best that I do not go after them."

"I know that it is best, and you must not even remain here, but go at once, and I will join you at the cottonwoods, for I have my father's bay horse, Red Bird, which is said to be the fleetest animal on the prairies."

"Excepting my own beautiful Featherhoof," he answered with a smile, while he patted the splendid roan horse he bestrode with real affection.

"I would like to match Red Bird and Featherhoof for a race some day," said the maiden, who had an enthusiastic love for horseflesh, and temporarily forgetting the danger the man before her stood in.

"You shall, some time, for a mile or fifty as you please; but see, they are changing the guard, so you had better go at once, and I will be ready in an instant and join you at the cottonwoods."

"Adieu until then, sweet Sibyl," he said gallantly, and touching his sombrero he rode slowly toward the garrison gate.

As he approached, he saw that a sergeant was giving some order to the sentinel on duty, and that the eyes of both were upon him, and some presentiment in his breast bespoke trouble ahead.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE FLIGHT.

WITH an air of perfect coolness, as though he suspected no danger to himself, The Gentleman from Texas approached the garrison gate.

The soldier on duty, upon seeing him come near, at a word, in a whisper from the sergeant at his side, ordered sternly:

"Halt!"

"Ay, ay, my friend, but I wish to pass out," was the cool response.

"Orders against it, sir," replied the sentinel.

"What means this, sergeant?" asked Gold Spur, turning to the sergeant of the guard.

"I was told, sir, that you were under suspicion, and not to let you leave the garrison," answered the sergeant politely, for there was that in the bearing of Gold Spur that commanded respect.

"I was released by Colonel Eldred from that charge, sergeant, and I acknowledge no other man's right to detain me," said Gold Spur sternly.

"Sorry, sir, but my orders were given by Captain Moreland, not ten minutes ago."

"What are your orders regarding me?"

"To put you under arrest and carry you to the guard-house, and I do hope you won't make me use force."

"What if I should?" was the smiling question, but it was a dangerous smile, had the sergeant analyzed it carefully.

"I have orders to kill you, sir, if you resist."

"Indeed! then it would be safer to submit quietly. Come, sergeant, walk over to the prison pen with me."

The sergeant obeyed, and, he walking, Gold Spur riding, they had gone some forty paces, when the latter drew rein and dropped his hand lightly upon the shoulder of the soldier, and said in his most winning way:

"Guess you better let me leave the garrison, sergeant."

"Cannot do it, sir," was the firm response.

"Do you think you could stop me if I wanted to go out?" and the smile was as pleasant as ever upon the lips of Gold Spur.

"I know your strength, sir, for I saw you grapple the Hercules lieutenant, and I am the smallest man in the regiment; but the sentinel there would stop you."

"What with?"

"His carbine, for he has orders to shoot you if you attempted to go by, and a very little ball will kill a very large man."

"True, but I'll risk it."

Instantly the touch on the shoulder became a gripe of iron, and the little sergeant was dragged from his feet up into the air and seated in front of The Gentleman from Texas and held there with a force that was irresistible.

"Come, Featherhoof!"

At the cry of his master the splendid animal wheeled instinctively and bounded for the gate,

directly toward the surprised and startled sentinel, who half raised his rifle, as if to fire.

"Hold! or you will kill your sergeant," cried Gold Spur, and, unnerved by the possibility, the sentinel lowered his carbine and tried to close the gate.

"Out of the way, or I ride you down!" yelled Gold Spur, and just in time the soldier sprung aside.

"Shoot his horse, Gaines!" yelled the sergeant, undaunted by the fearful gripe upon him and his position.

"I'll do it!" shouted the soldier as the splendid roan dashed by, and he again was raising his rifle, when Gold Spur quickly wheeled in his saddle, a flash and report followed the thrusting forward of his arm, and the carbine fell to the ground, for the sentinel's arm was shattered.

"I've put him off duty for awhile, sergeant, not caring to kill him," was the grim remark of the Texan, as Featherhoof flew on over the prairie, not seemingly caring for her double weight.

"Hark! there's the alarm; they are to give me a chase, sergeant, so I guess we might as well part company," was the cool remark of Gold Spur as the alarm rung out in the garrison, and the bugles were blowing "boots and saddles" with ringing notes.

"I am willing to part with you, sir, for I must say you are akin to Satan," said the plucky sergeant, who felt that he was as a child in the arms of a giant.

A merry laugh at his words broke from the lips of The Gentleman from Texas, and he answered:

"No, sergeant; I do not claim such distinguished kindred. Ho! Featherhoof!"

The obedient animal came to a quick halt, and the sergeant was lowered to the ground with an ease that caused him to remark:

"I didn't think human bone and sinew could get so strong as you are."

"Man's brain, bone and sinew can accomplish anything, sergeant, if trained to it; but now, good-by; but say to your commandant when he returns from his fruitless chase, to feel no anxiety for his lovely niece and her fair friend, for I will bring them back."

"You?"

"Yes."

"You are out of the garrison, now, and boldly you got out, too, sir, and I advise you to stay away, or they will hang you."

"I'll take the chances, sergeant; see! yonder come your comrades in hot pursuit, so I'll leave you."

"And there comes the Child of the Regiment like the very wind behind them."

"You are right, sergeant; and I wouldn't wonder if she was the only one of the riders that dare follow me; *adios, senor*, as we say in Texas," and with a wave of his hand Gold Spur sped away, for already the troopers were drawing rapidly within range.

"Well, if that isn't the devil in disguise, just set me down for a fool," muttered the sergeant, as he gazed after the retreating Gentleman from Texas.

CHAPTER XVII.

GOLD SPUR'S PURSUERS.

"BRAVO! for the Child of the Regiment."

The cry broke from a half-a-hundred soldiers, who were grouped about the garrison gate, watching the score of troopers that had just dashed through in pursuit of Gold Spur, whose daring escape had been witnessed by many.

Captain Moreland, the officer in command, had mounted picked men only, on the very fleetest horses in the command, and dispatched them under Lieutenant Emmerson, who was known to possess a superb mount, and be an officer of untiring energy, and undaunted courage.

"I am convinced, Emmerson, that yonder fellow must be the White Jackal, in disguise, so run him to earth, or kill him!" was the order of the captain.

"All right, sir, and the sad-faced lieutenant sprung into his saddle, and with his score of picked troopers dashed away in pursuit.

The gates were thrown wide open to let them pass, the wounded sentinel as he was being borne to the hospital sent a "God speed" after them, and straight for the horseman far out on the prairie, and the sergeant standing by his side, they went.

"Guess the sergeant's got him in some way, or he wouldn't stop there," said a corporal.

"Bah! there's no sergeant or captain either that can get the better o' that man," said a buckskinned hunter of the garrison, contemptuously.

"He's just stopped to send his respects back to the garrison," remarked another.

"He's jist ther cool man ter do it," added a third.

"Clear the way!"

The clear tones in a voice so musical, caused every man to turn his gaze from the prairie to the garrison parade-ground, and there, to their surprise, they beheld a horsewoman coming on like a whirlwind.

It was Sibyl, the child of the regiment, and

her musical voice, pitched to its full hight, had warned them of her coming.

Quickly they stepped aside, leaving the gate clear, and like an arrow she shot through, and an officer cried:

"Which way, girl?"

"After The Gentleman from Texas," came back the response, and then arose the cheer and bravo that open this chapter.

"That's the horse as will do it," cried a soldier.

"It is her father's Red Bird," shouted another.

"The gamest and fleetest animal on the prairie," put in a third with enthusiasm.

Then followed comments about the maiden:

"She rides like a Comanche!"

"See how she drives Red Bird ahead!"

"She's gaining on the boys!"

"By Jove! she'll be the only one to overtake the Jackal!"

"The Jackal will nab her, too!"

This last remark seemed to bring consternation among the group, for already had the young girl won the hearts of the regiment that had adopted her, and the thought came:

"What if the Jackal should get into his power the beautiful Child of the Regiment?"

"Soldiers, give me way, please!"

All again turned, and they beheld Clarice Conrad, the beautiful child-widow, and she was looking upon them with her sweetest smile.

Mounted upon a dark gray mare, an animal evidently possessed of great speed and endurance, and which she had brought with her, she said, from her ranch in Texas, and dressed in a habit of dark blue, with a gray slouch hat, and sable ostrich plume, shading her lovely face, she certainly looked beautiful enough to turn the strongest head, and touch the hardest heart.

Instinctively the soldiers fell back from before her way, and saluted politely, and touching her hat gayly she too darted away upon the trail of the others who had gone in pursuit of The Gentleman from Texas.

"Waal, this beats my time; gals on ther trail worse nor a wolf," muttered an old guide in buckskin.

"She rides like a witch, and she's got horseflesh under her that knows how to go," remarked a corporal, as the child-widow flew away from the garrison with the speed of a bird.

"Here comes the sergeant, and we'll know how he feels," said a soldier, as the sergeant, who had served as a shield for Gold Spur, came slowly toward the gate.

"Well, sergeant, glad to see you back; had a pleasant ride?" cried a young officer gayly.

But the sergeant seemed in no humor for joking; he still felt the gripe of Gold Spur burning upon his shoulder and side, and answered:

"No, sir, my ride was not a pleasant one, for the Devil had his gripe upon me," and moodily he passed on into the garrison.

CHAPTER XVIII.

A MAD RACE.

WHEN Gold Spur rode away from the sergeant, whom he left standing in the middle of the prairie, it was not his intention to run his pursuers out of sight, as he believed he could do, but to keep out of range of their shots, and he noticed with pleasure, that, believing in the speed of their horses, and wishing to aid them all they could, they had left their carbines behind them.

Seeing that the troopers were urging their animals hard, and wishing to measure their speed, Gold Spur gave the word to Featherhoof to go ahead, and instantly he discovered that he had no cause to dread the horses upon his trail.

"Back, old fellow, for we have nothing to fear," he said gently, reigning the fleet creature back to a sweeping gallop, that held his distance as he wanted it.

Then he turned and saw that the Child of the Regiment was gaining rapidly upon the troopers.

"The girl is well mounted, and can pass them; yes, she has my saddle-pocket and haversack," he said, placing a small field-glass to his eye, and half wheeling in his saddle and regarding her.

"By the Prairie Spirit! there is another woman on horseback! Who is she, and what does she want in this chase?" he cried, suddenly, and once more his glass was raised to his eyes.

"It is Clarice! What in Satan's name brings her here?"

"By Heaven! but she too is well mounted, and gains rapidly on the troopers."

So saying, he held quietly on his way; but his brow had become clouded, and his lips firm set, for it was evident that some bitter memories had been summoned up from the bygone, at the sight of the child-widow.

In the mean time Sibyl had steadily gained upon the party of Lieutenant Emmerson, and one by one she passed the pursuing troopers, each of whom had a kind word for her, and an expression of admiration at her splendid horsemanship.

A word in response, and the young girl held on, for her thoughts were on the man far ahead.

One by one she passed the troopers, until only Edgar Emmerson was ahead of her, and the speed of his horse had caused him to forge far in advance of his men.

"Well, Miss Sibyl, you have joined in the chase too, it seems; I am delighted at the pleasure of your company," he said, pleasantly, touching the fine animal he rode with the spur, as he saw that the maiden's horse was going by.

"I regret that I cannot remain and enjoy your company, Lieutenant Emmerson," she answered.

"What! do you return to the garrison?"

"No, I continue on after The Gentleman from Texas."

"I beg of you not to do that, for I am convinced that the man is not what he professes to be."

"I do not fear him, sir."

Again the spurs touched the lieutenant's horse, for Red Bird was half a length ahead, and the animal forged along level again, while his rider remarked:

"I know not what to think of the man; but, as I see you have the faster horse, let me beg that you remain with me."

"I cannot, sir."

"That man may keep you as a hostage to hold us at bay."

"I have no fear of that; besides, he can easily leave you, as see, his horse is not at more than half speed."

"True; I never saw a fleetier animal, and he runs like a deer, seemingly without an effort; but again I ask you to hold back," and the cruel spurs were driven so hard and fast upon the straining horse of the lieutenant, that Red Bird was again dropping behind, in spite of his great efforts to keep up.

"No, I must go on," was the firm response.

"For what purpose, for surely you do not expect to capture him?"

"Oh no, I intend to do him a service," was the significant reply.

"A service!" cried the surprised officer, again raking his spurs along the flanks of his horse.

"See, Lieutenant Emmerson. Yonder is company for you, and beautiful company too, for it is your sister."

"My sister!" and the man wheeled quickly, while his face changed color, as he glanced back in the direction in which Sibyl looked.

"Yes, she too is coming on in pursuit of Gold Spur, it seems; but good-by, for really I cannot tarry longer, as your horse is so poky."

With a light laugh she loosened the draw she had held on the reins; and Red Bird sprang away from the straining horse at his quarter, and which Sibyl had called poky, when there were few animals in the regiment his equal, and the Deserter Lieutenant's only his superior.

Edgar Emmerson uttered something very like an oath, as Red Bird bounded away, but, as his gaze was back upon the fair form upon the dark iron-gray, so rapidly passing his troopers, it was not known whether it was Sibyl's desertion or the prospect of his sister's coming that brought the profanity to his lips.

Once freed from the restraint of the small but firm hands that drew against his bit, Red Bird seemed fairly to fly over the prairie, and soon began to gain upon Gold Spur, whose animal was still holding to his steady, fleet, and sweeping gallop.

With the winning smile, the beauty of which fascinated the man upon whom she bent it, the child widow passed each trooper, as Sibyl had done, with a pleasant word, and then began to overhaul her brother.

Once or twice he had glanced over his shoulder at her coming, and each time his brow had darkened, and his eyes had become more melancholy in their glance.

At last he knew that she was close upon him, and yet he did not turn his face from the front, until the head of the iron gray was level with his knee.

"Well, Sir Moody, have you no word of welcome at my coming, no admiration for my splendid horse that has so easily passed the picked animals of your regiment?" she said gayly.

"I know not why you have come, Clarice," he replied.

"To be with you: to fly by your side over the rolling prairie, brother mine," she said with a look of scorn that gave the lie direct to her words.

"You had other motive, Clarice," he replied, unheeding her sarcasm, and noticing only the remark.

"Had I? What, pray?"

"You visited yonder man in the guard-house, when he was a prisoner there?"

"I did."

"You have met him before?"

"Have I?"

"You know well who he is?"

"Do I?"

"Will you not answer me?"

"What do you wish me to say?" she said impetuously, reining her dark gray back, as her brother urged his straining animal on.

"Tell me the truth."

"Why will not a lie do as well, brother mine?"

"Doubtless you prefer lies to truth," he sneered.

"I prefer whatever answers my purpose."

"And you will not answer me?"

"Yes."

"Have you met that man before?"

"The Gentleman from Texas?"

"Yes."

"I have."

"Who is he?" he sternly asked.

"Lend me your ear, brother mine, for I would not that the balmy prairie winds should catch up my secret and bear it to others."

He leaned toward her and she whispered but two words; but they turned his face to the hue of a corpse, and he reeled in his saddle, while, with a ringing laugh she bounded away, once more hot on the trail of the two in advance.

CHAPTER XIX.

SIBYL'S SIGNAL.

We left The Gentleman from Texas, mounted upon his matchless steed, sweeping over the prairie with a long line of pursuers behind him.

Among these pursuers, the gallant troopers, who should have been the ones to press him hardest, were in the rear, strung out in Indian file, according to the speed of their respective steeds, and yet pressing on with good intent to be in at the death if wind and muscle held out.

The next behind Gold Spur in pursuit, was Sibyl the Child of the Regiment, and steadily her noble horse was gaining upon him, though not yet had the lash touched his glossy hide.

Behind her, a hundred yards, or more, and holding her own, if not gaining slightly, was the child widow, Clarice Conrad, and her eyes seemed fixed upon the two ahead, a strange look having come over her beautiful face, since her words to her brother which had so moved him.

"Come, Gray Gull, what is the matter with you?" she cried, with a harshness one would not have believed could have passed her ripe, red lips, and once, twice, thrice the keen whip fell upon the horse, and caused him to snort with pain, and bound forward at a speed that threatened soon to overhaul Red Bird.

The snort of the gray, and the crack of the whip reached the ears of Sibyl, and glancing behind her she discovered that the widow had not stopped with her brother, as she had expected her to do, but was coming on a pace that was quickly lessening the distance between them.

"Come, Red Bird, you must show that you deserve your name of being the fleetest of the regiment; come, old fellow!" she cried sharply, and Red Bird began to mend his pace with a will.

But the widow now showered blows upon Gray Gull, and that animal, mad with pain, unaccustomed to such treatment from the fair hands of his mistress, and frightened by her angry voice, bounded forward with greater speed, and again steadily gained upon Red Bird.

"She has some motive in this, and what can it be?" muttered Sibyl. "I remember hearing the colonel tell her brother that she recognized Gold Spur as a man she had known in Texas; hark! she is calling to me to wait for her, but I will pretend not to hear her; come, Red Bird, or you will ruin all," and then, for the first time, Sibyl's whip descended upon the glossy red hide of the flying animal, which had been her father's pride, and that was his personal property, he having captured him from an Indian chief whom he had killed.

That Red Bird was surprised at the blow was evident, for he gave a bound that almost unseated Sibyl, and with his neck stretched far out, ran along at a pace that was terrific, each cut of the lash on Gray Gull, causing him to quiver, fearing another stroke from the firm hand that held his rein.

"Come, Bird, you must go faster, for you've got a Texan in your rear that is as fast as you are; come, the gray is gaining upon you, and I must give these things to yonder noble man, for I do not believe he is what men say he is," and once more the whip descended, and snorting with pain Red Bird mended his pace.

But Gray Gull was coming on at terrific bounds, urged by the cruel lash, and strive as he might, Red Bird was being gained upon, and Sibyl recognized the fact, that ere another mile was gone over, if the wind of the widow's steed held out, she would overtake her.

Then she turned her eyes upon the form ahead, who had not once looked around, nor checked the steady, sweeping gallop of Featherhoof, and saw that she was not gaining upon him fast enough to reach him before Clarice Conrad would be alongside.

The things she had for Gold Spur she had fastened firmly to her saddle, and she was determined to give them to him, if she rode Red Bird to death.

Besides, there was in her mind an idea that he would see her father, and she wished him to tell him that she believed him true, whatever those who doubted him might say.

Finding, however, that the Gray Gull was still gaining, she suddenly determined to signal

to Gold Spur to ride slower, and putting the handle of her whip to her lips she gave one long, loud, shrill call.

It reached the ears of the trooper furthest in the rear, and ran along the line, surprising the lieutenant, who was still urging his horse forward with all speed; it was heard by the child widow, and her beautiful eyes became fixed upon the handsome form of The Gentleman from Texas to note its effect upon him, for well she knew it was intended as a signal to him.

The call reached the ears of Gold Spur too, and he turned gracefully in his saddle, and calmly surveyed the position of affairs, while he muttered:

"The troopers are beaten; but the lieutenant holds on well; and Clarice! she urges that Gray of hers on with the same determination with which she goes into everything."

"Yes, that call came from that glorious little beauty, the Child of the Regiment; she sees that Clarice is beating her and signals for me to draw rein, for without doubt she has my traps for me; ah! there is the signal again," and instantly, like a top, Featherhoof spun to the right about, and at the same sweeping gallop started on the back trail, directly toward Sibyl.

The widow saw the act, as well as did the Child of the Regiment, and she firmly lashed her horse to reach the maiden ere Gold Spur did.

The lieutenant and his troopers beheld the act, and pressed on, for, not understanding the cause of the strange maneuver, they feared for the widow and the maiden.

The deed was also seen by those at the garrison, and standing upon the parapet of the fort, and dreading too for the safety of Clarice and Sibyl, as he expected Gold Spur, having observed the greater speed of their horses to those of the troopers, intended to run off with both of them, Captain Moreland called a crew to a gun, and sighting the cannon himself fired it, straight at the daring horseman, now nearly three miles distant on the prairie.

CHAPTER XX.

FOILED BY A GIRL.

THE ROAR of the coming shot, a twenty-four pounder, and the boom of the gun came together hurtling over the prairie, and, well aimed, the iron missile struck the ground not sixty feet from Gold Spur, and, with a ricochet, went flying over his head.

But though the gray of the widow gave a sudden shy at the whizzing shot, neither Red Bird nor Featherhoof started, and the course of the latter was not changed, only his speed slightly increased.

A moment after, and before a second shot was fired from the fort, Gold Spur wheeled alongside of Red Bird, and the two horses were running along side by side, with the widow coming on, thirty lengths in the rear.

"Well, my Child of the Regiment, Red Bird has tested Featherhoof's speed and endurance sooner than you thought," said Gold Spur, pleasantly.

"Yes, and has been shown that your horse is as wonderful as his master; but this is no time for words, but acts; here are your traps," and she unloosed the saddle pockets and handed them to him.

He threw them across his saddle and then received from her hands the haversack, and said, quickly:

"I thank you, but I hope your service to me will not get you into trouble with your regimental fathers."

"Do not fear for me, sir; but oh! if you see my own father tell him I do not believe that he has become what men say he is, and will not so believe until I see him with my own eyes at the head of a red-skin band."

She spoke earnestly, and the tears filled her beautiful eyes as they were turned upon Gold Spur, who answered kindly:

"Little girl, your father is under a cloud now; but, my word for it, he has been belied, and that one day the clouds will drift away, dark as they seem now."

"Now you must return, for the fair lady in our rear is almost upon us, as Red Bird is fagged from your hard driving. Good-by, and say to Colonel Eldred, when you see him, that I will place Miss Eldred and Miss Gerard in safety in his hands."

"You!" and Sibyl's beautiful eyes opened with a look of real suspicion.

"Yes, I," he answered with a smile.

"Oh, sir! tell me, you are not what men believe you?" she cried earnestly.

"I am Gold Spur, The Gentleman from Texas," he said calmly.

"And Gold Spur, The Gentleman from Texas, you die!"

Like a rocket Gray Gull dashed alongside, and the pretty arm of the widow was thrust forward, and a pistol was leveled full at the head of Gold Spur.

And now, the tiny forefinger touched the trigger, the weapon exploded, and the bullet, intended for the brain of Gold Spur, went above his head, almost grazing it.

And the hand, which in the nick of time had struck up the weapon, was Sibyl's, the Child of the Regiment.

"Foiled! and by you, girl! You shall rue this act," cried the widow with a fierceness she did not disguise.

Instantly Gold Spur drew rein, and the three horses stood in a group together, while the man said sternly:

"Sibyl, you have saved my life, and if harm befalls you for so doing, I swear to you, Clarice Conrad, that you will die cursing the mother that brought you into life."

The man's face was dark now with suppressed passion, and his eyes burned with a brilliant fierceness that was fearful to look upon, and Clarice Conrad bent her head to escape their intense gaze upon her, while Sibyl, frightened at the sudden transformation that the face of Gold Spur had undergone, such a change as a being might wear in being hurled from heaven into hell, cried pleadingly:

"No, no, she will not harm me, so spare her."

"Good-by, Sibyl, and heed my parting words: shun that beautiful woman as you would a hideous serpent."

Without another word he wheeled his horse away from the other two, and like a rocket, the fleet animal, now put to his speed, went over the prairie, showing how utterly useless was all pursuit from the troopers, who were still pressing on.

And like two statues the two women, the child widow and the young girl, sat watching each other, and in the heart of the latter was creeping a great fear of the one who gazed upon her.

Perhaps Clarice Conrad saw this, for the hard look upon her face suddenly changed to one of intense sweetness, and her words were musical as the notes of a flute, while the touch of her hand, as she laid it on Sibyl's hand, was as soft as velvet, and thrilling as a lover's, as she said:

"Sibyl, my poor child, some time I will tell you a secret, but not now, not now."

"Just now you saved the life of one who had deeply wronged me in the past; oh! how deeply."

"But I forgive you, and beg you to forget my unkind words; yet, if you had suffered as I have through yonder flying devil, then would you not wonder that I tried to kill him, and you pity me; well, brother mine, your pursuit is useless," and she turned to Lieutenant Emmerson who just then drew rein at their side.

"Yes, for he seems mounted upon the wings of the wind; but who fired that shot?"

"Some one at the fort, Edgar."

"I mean the pistol-shot?" he said impatiently.

"I did."

"You shot at the Texan?"

"Yes."

"And missed him at close quarters? You were once a dead shot, Clarice," and he bent his sad eyes upon her with a gaze she seemed to understand, for she answered:

"And am now, brother mine; but The Gentleman from Texas bears a charmed life; come, give up the chase, for your horses are out of wind, and let us return in company to The gar-rison."

"I see no other thing to do with that winged-hoofed animal ahead of me," said Lieutenant Emmerson, and with another glance at the flying Texan, the three turned back toward the fort, the troopers being only too willing to give up a hopeless chase.

CHAPTER XXI.

FOLLOWING A PHANTOM.

I WILL now return to the night that opens this story, when the troopers, bivouacked in the timber, beheld on the moonlit prairie the strange, phantom-like forms of a horse and rider, and heard the cry of the whip-o-will, which had so deeply moved Sergeant Sylvester, that he had gone alone in pursuit of the specter, or whatever it might be.

Mounted upon his dragoon charger he rode rapidly out toward the phantom, which retreated before his advance, still uttering the mournful whip-o-will's cry.

At length, after a long chase over the rolling prairies the misty forms of horse and rider stopped upon a slight rise, and there stood in bold relief against the moonlit skies.

Unhesitatingly Sergeant Sylvester approached, his brow dark, his lips sternly set, and yet seemingly fearing no dread encounter, for he had not drawn a weapon from his holster, and his sword hung at rest in its scabbard.

Nearer and nearer he approached until he drew rein within a few paces of the phantom-like forms he had so persistently followed.

Then he halted and gazed more earnestly, for he saw that the horse was enveloped in a gauzy covering of white, as was also the form of the rider, which gave to them their ghostly look.

The rider's face, however, was covered by the same material, and there was that about the mysterious being who had impersonated a specter, that caused the soldier to quickly drop his hand upon the revolver in his saddle holster.

"Hold!" came in a clear, musical voice from the phantom, who had seen the act, and

the white-covered arm was held forth to stay his hand.

"Who are you?" asked the sergeant, still keeping his hand on the handle of his revolver.

"Heard you not the cry of the whip-o-will?" was the reply.

"Yes, but why does that cry come from your lips?"

"I was sent by one who told me that you would follow that cry."

"And where is that one who sent you?"

"Far from here in the camp of his people."

"And he sent you for me?"

"Yes."

"Who am I?"

"Maurice Sylvester."

"Ha! you do know me then?" said the sergeant quickly.

"Yes, I know you."

"Give me the name of the one that sent you for me?"

"It matters not what be his name; he has sent for you, and you must go," was the calm reply.

"Ha! who told you this?"

"He did."

"Did he tell you why?"

"No."

"You are sure?" asked the sergeant earnestly.

"Yes."

"And who are you?"

"It matters not."

"You are a woman."

"My voice would betray that."

"I will follow you: lead on!"

Without a word the woman, for such she was, turned her horse and led the way over the prairie, heading in the direction of a dark line that broke the horizon and which marked the course of the Republican.

"Faster, for I would rejoin my command as soon as possible," said the sergeant, and without a word, the strange, phantom-like guide urged her horse into a canter, and the sergeant followed her example.

Several times he attempted to ride alongside of her to hold conversation with her, but each time she quickened her pace in a manner that told him she wished to remain unquestioned.

At last he called out to her:

"Why is it that he who sent you after me has come to this border?"

"He has his own reasons for so doing," was the curt reply.

"And how knew he that I was stationed here?"

"Ask him," was the abrupt response, and the sergeant remained silent.

After a long ride the banks of the river were reached, and, as though thoroughly acquainted with the locality, the woman turned up the stream and continued on until they came to a small valley, in which glimmered a score of smoldering camp-fires.

A challenge, in an Indian tongue, now rung out from a clump of box elder bushes ahead, and was promptly answered by the shrill bark of the coyote, from the lips of the ghost-like guide.

Without halting, or other interruption she led the way into the little valley, passing numbers of horses picketed out, and dark forms sleeping upon the grass, and at last drawing rein beneath a large ash tree.

"Dismount," she said quietly, and, as an Indian came forward, in full war-paint and feathers, she asked in the Sioux tongue, which the sergeant understood:

"Where is the chief?"

"Off on the prairie," was the quiet reply.

"You must wait, for he is not here," she said, turning to the trooper.

"When will he return?" he asked of the warrior.

The reply was a shake of the head, and the woman said:

"You must be content to wait; if you are hungry I will get you food."

"I care for no food; I only wish to see your chief."

"Then you must wait," was the abrupt reply, and the woman threw aside the white vailing that she had worn, and, to his surprise, the sergeant beheld a young and beautiful face, though it was almost as dark as the Indian's who stood near.

"You are no red-skin?" he said to her inquiringly.

"No."

"What are you?"

"A Mexican," she answered, and the dress she wore carried out the belief.

"What are you to—the chief?" he asked.

She smiled grimly, and replied simply:

"His best friend."

The sergeant gazed an instant upon the dark, beautiful face, as if striving to read there, by the aid of the moonlight, what her lips would not reveal, and then, with a sigh, began to pace to and fro, his each step watched by the Indian warrior, until at last he felt that he was under the espionage of the savage. Determined to see if he was correct, he said after awhile, addressing the woman, who had thrown herself in a Mexican hammock swung between two trees:

"I obeyed the call of your chief, but I care

not to see him, so will return to my command; should he desire to see me, let him seek me again."

"You must await his coming," she said firmly.

"I cannot."

"You must."

"I will not be forced, against my will to stay; he should have been here to meet me after sending for me," and the sergeant turned toward his horse, but the warrior quickly stepped between him and the animal, and he knew that he was a prisoner, and that to resist would be utterly useless.

For an hour or more he paced to and fro in a amiable mood, and his brow was dark, his lips compressed with the emotions that crowded upon him.

Then, suddenly, an excitement was visible in the outer edge of the camp, and a horseman dashed up and gave a rapid order in the Sioux tongue.

Instantly scores of dark forms sprung from the velvety grass where they had been sleeping, and within a minute's time the camp was broken up and the red horsemen were on the march, the sergeant finding himself between two huge warriors, and the strange woman, in her ghostly robes, riding on in advance.

"Where is your chief?" he asked the warrior on his right.

"He is waiting up the river."

"He sent you word to come there?"

"Yes."

And no more was said until, after a long ride, and just before dawn, the red horsemen halted in a piece of timber, where already were a number more, apparently awaiting their coming.

"Is your chief here?" asked the sergeant of the woman, who was taking the white robe from around her form.

"You will see him at the proper time," was her reply, and with it he was forced to rest content.

Then, closely watching, he saw Indian horsemen riding to and fro, evidently bent on some important mission, and after a short delay the two commands joined forces and moved forward at a swift gallop.

It was a rapid ride for a mile or more, and then a sudden halt and a few orders in ringing tones that caused the sergeant to start and gaze in the direction from whence came the voice.

A man of large stature, well-formed, and with a painted face, was riding toward him.

He was attired in a full Indian suit, chief's feathers and all, and thoroughly armed and splendidly mounted, while he spoke in the Indian tongue.

But in spite of that circumstance, notwithstanding his painted face and chief's feathers, Sergeant Sylvester knew that he was a white man, and called to him.

But, unheeding the call, from the lips of the chief, for such the actions of all proved him to be, broke one long, loud war-whoop, and with answering yells the whole band of red horsemen dashed out of the timber and headed up into a beautiful valley.

In their midst, borne along with the red tidal-wave, was the sergeant, and, with a glance of horror, he saw then what it was that the painted fiends were heading for.

And the sight drove the blood in torrents to the heart of Maurice Sylvester, for he found himself in the midst of a band of savages, rushing down upon a wagon-train of his own race; he heard the shouts of the defenders, the shrieks of the women and children, the wild rattle of the rifles and war-whoops of the red-skins, and wished that he had died ere he had been forced into that fearful scene.

Then, as the red line wavered before the fire of the emigrants, and others crowding on, forced them forward once more, there came the clear, ringing cheer of his own regiment, and he saw his own comrades dashing to the attack.

How they had gotten there he knew not, cared not, only he knew that he was among their foes, and then he saw that the red-skins were beaten, and he sought to escape, to fly, and not be seen.

But alas! his hope was vain, his comrades were upon him, and with his horse shot down, Maurice Sylvester felt that he was a lost man, and that fate had dealt him a blow that struck to his heart and brain, which echoed with the cries of his former friends and soldiers in arms, as they hurled upon him the names of renegade and deserter.

CHAPTER XXII.

FROM DESPAIR TO HOPE.

THE result of the unfortunate sergeant's capture, in the midst of the red-skins by his own companions in arms, is known to the reader, and they have followed his career to the escape from the guard-house, by the aid of the daring and mysterious man who called himself The Gentleman from Texas.

To the better explain that escape I will return to the time when the friends of the condemned man were allowed to visit him, this being a preconcerted plan to aid Gold Spur in his intended rescue.

Among those admitted at will, was Sibyl,

the Child of the Regiment, who had found her father, but to feel that death must claim him from her, unless Gold Spur kept his promise to her, and how that was to be done she could see no possible way.

Acting, however, under his advice, she had entered the guard-room during the afternoon prior to the night of the escape, and drawing a stool near where the moody prisoner sat, said quietly:

"Father, there is one here who would serve you, if you will promise to do as he says."

"What service can mortal man render me now, my child?" was the despondent rejoinder.

"Give you your liberty."

The sergeant started and gazed fixedly into the face of his daughter, who said:

"I mean it, father."

"The colonel commandant alone can pardon me, child, and I feel that he will not, for my seeming offense is too flagrant, and all points so thoroughly to my guilt as a deserter."

"It is not the colonel; he can or will do nothing; the one I speak of is a man who intends to rescue you."

"No, I am sentenced to die; so let it be, as life certainly has not been bright to me."

"In the past, no, perhaps; but in the future it will be different."

"How can it be, with this stigma upon me that has brought me where I am?" he asked, bitterly.

"You have me to love now, father, and I will not see you die."

"But must I fly like a guilty man from death? Rather let me, with my last words, protest my innocence, and then die like a brave man."

"You will be cared for, Sibyl, for my comrades, from the colonel down, will be as fathers to you."

"No, no, I have found you to love you, and I will not lose you; you must go from here, father."

"No, I will meet my fate."

"Oh, father! why will you remain to die, when you can escape and live?" she cried.

"Death were preferable to life with this stain upon me; I will remain and meet my fate, Sibyl."

She arose and paced the room nervously for awhile, and then, without another word, left the room.

For a short while only he was alone with his bitter thoughts, and then the door opened, and in came The Gentleman from Texas, his face wearing that fearless, confident look that seemed never to desert it.

Behind him came Sibyl, looking nervous and anxious, and she said, in a voice that trembled: "Father, The Gentleman from Texas has come to see you."

The two men looked into each other's eyes, and the sergeant asked in a peculiar way:

"Somewhere before, sir, we have met?"

"Worry not your mind with fancied resemblances to others you have met, Sergeant Sylvester, but listen to me," was the pleasant reply, and drawing his stool up in front of the condemned man, he continued:

"Your daughter tells me you refuse to leave here?"

"Why should I?"

"You are not guilty of the charges against you."

"Ha! you believe this?"

"I know it."

"Who are you?" and the sergeant bent his gaze more earnestly upon the face of his visitor.

"It matters not that I am other than I say, one who believes in your innocence, and am determined you shall prove it."

"Alas! how can I?" was the dejected response.

"Not when you are food for worms, I admit; but if you are free, and can go away from here, in time you may be able to prove your innocence."

"I could only do so at the sacrifice of another."

"So I believed; but circumstances may aid you, and I say go."

"No, no, I cannot."

"I say yes; here you will die like a dog for a crime you are at heart innocent of, no matter how circumstantial evidence may point to your guilt: away from here you can clear yourself, in some way, or at least find a home far from here for your daughter, who will gladly come to you, and for her sake, and the hope of rubbing the tarnish from your own name, I say go."

"You argue well, sir; but how am I to leave?" said Sylvester, his face brightening, as though with some sudden hope.

"Now you are reasonable, and I will tell you my plan; I am to play prisoner in your stead; you will have a number of visitors, for your daughter and myself will arrange that, and I will drop in and out often, and at last remain, while you, in my clothing will leave and depart from the garrison, after nightfall."

"Ah, sir, but look at us."

"You are about my size and build, and—"

"My beard will betray me."

"Bah! what care you for your beard; cut it

off, for therein lies not your strength or honor."

"And you, sir?"

"Will play prisoner as well as you do."

"And the result?"

"I will be set free."

"No, no, you will get into trouble."

"Trust me for that; if I do, I'll get out, as I have thousands of times before."

"I cannot think of allowing you to be punished in my stead, for serving me."

"I tell you I will have no trouble, and I pledge you that if I do you can return and give yourself up."

"So be it, I will go."

"Now you are sensible," and Gold Spur turned away, while, weeping with joy Sibyl threw herself into her father's arms.

And out and in the daughter and the Texan went during the afternoon, with other visitors, until at last the exchange of clothing was quickly made, the long beard of the sergeant was cut off, and the false beard of Gold Spur put on, and the latter grasped the hand of his strange friend in farewell.

Accompanied by his daughter, who, with some pleasantries occupied the sentinel, the trooper passed out of the guard-house, and still believed, in the darkness, to be The Gentleman from Texas, left the garrison and was soon upon the broad prairies a free man.

CHAPTER XXIII.

IN THE LASSO'S COIL.

WHEN the dark outline of the garrison, with its twinkling lights, was behind him, and the rolling prairie in his front, Sergeant Maurice Sylvester paused to think, and his eyes were turned back upon the scene from whence he had just emerged.

"Who is that strange man, and why has he thus saved my life?" he muttered, thinking more of the one who had so nobly aided him than of his own freedom seemingly.

"I feel that we have met before, yet where and when?"

"These questions I cannot answer, but I must solve the mystery some day."

"Now I am free, and I will go at once to— Oh Heaven! why has he brought this sorrow upon me, this shame, beneath which I so nearly died?"

"But I will go to him, and I will make him prove that I meant not to be as vile as he is."

"Yes, I will do this for Sibyl's, my child's sake, for how noble she is not to turn against me, when she came to me, but to find that I was accused of crime so base."

"But will he do aught to aid me in this?"

He drew rein, for his horse had been slowly moving along, as he asked this question.

"No, for he has been the one to wreck my life, and he will not help me to free myself of the charge upon me: but he shall, if not, I will, for my child's sake, confess the secret I would not reveal to the court-martial, and which would have cleared me, but which I kept locked in my heart to save him."

"But now my child, my beautiful Sibyl pleads, and I will act, if he will do nothing."

As though having made up his mind just what he would do, he set off at a swift canter across the prairie, and held his course in the direction of the Republican.

He was well mounted and thoroughly equipped, for The Gentleman from Texas had been most thorough in all he had done for the sergeant, and being a man who understood prairie-craft, he knew well how to find his way.

At his first halt, an hour before daylight, he picketed his horse out to feed on the rich grass, on the edge of a small clump of timber, and lay down to rest; but no sleep would come to his eyelids, and rising, he paced to and fro, his thoughts busy.

After he thought his horse had had ample rest, for the sun was far up above the horizon, he mounted and held on his way once more, and soon reached the river, where he again halted, and partook of a slight breakfast, which Sibyl had prepared for him.

As he was about to mount again, there came a sudden whirring sound in the air, and a dark coil settled over his shoulders, and he was jerked to the ground.

Ere he could release his arms, or draw a weapon, he beheld a tall form bending over him, and a pistol was leveled at his head, while a tall form and painted face looked down upon him.

His captor was the same one who had led the attack upon the emigrant train, and who, in spite of his painted face and costume of an Indian chief, was without doubt a white man, for he said in perfect English:

"Well, my gallant Mexican, I have you prisoner."

The prisoner turned his eyes searchingly upon the face of the speaker, and, in spite of the disguise recognized him, for he cried out:

"Good God! it is you! the very one I seek."

"Maurice Sylvester, upon my soul I did not know you; where is your beard, your uniform, and why are you in this attire of a Mexican?"

"I have a uniform in that saddle roll, but no longer have I a right to wear it, Moline, and this suit has served me well, for it has saved my life."

"What! you have then cast aside the brass buttons, and come to join me, have you?" said the man, with a sudden flash of fiendish triumph in his eyes.

"The uniform, in the eyes of my comrades I disgraced, and you it was, as in the past, that brought sorrow and shame upon me," bitterly said the sergeant.

"In Satan's name, what have I done?"

"You sent for me."

"Yes, I knew you were out with that cavalry scouting-party, and I summoned you with a signal which I knew you dared not disobey."

"And I went to you, but you remained away until I was caught in bad company by my comrades, and believed to be—"

"What?"

"As vile as you have become; a renegade to your own race," was the unhesitating rejoinder.

"Ha! ha! ha! and how hard that must have been for your virtuous ears to listen to, to be called a renegade."

"Well, I remember, that before I had time to talk with you, we attacked the train, and would have had it too, had not in some way, your accursed comrades gotten wind of our intention, and foiled us."

"I saw you in the charge, but had no time to speak with you, and found that you had escaped, so was now on my way to the fort to see you."

"What, you would have dared go there?"

"Why not?"

"You know what men call you?"

"Yes; but my life is in danger at all times; I wanted to see you, and I intended to visit the fort in some disguise."

"And are you here alone?"

"Yes, for my red devils are back in their secluded haunts."

"And what wished you with me, Moline?"

"To aid me."

"I aid you?" said the sergeant with scorn.

"Yes, why not?"

"You knew that I had cut loose from the past, and was leading an honorable life; why not let me continue so?" he said bitterly.

"Because it is to my interest to have it otherwise; I sent one to summon you with the call of the league, the whip-o-will."

"Alas! I recognized it but too well, and I obeyed it, but would to God, I had not done so."

"Bah! I dare you to disobey it; but listen, for I need your aid."

"I lay yonder in those bushes, for I saw you coming, and little dreamed who I was catching, when I threw my lariat over your shoulders: but, having you again in my power, I intend to use you."

"No, I will not aid you in one wrong act."

"We shall see; first, you must return to the garrison."

"I return to the garrison? Why, man, I am an outlaw, for I escaped from there last night under sentence of death, as a deserter and renegade, for having been found with your vile band," said the sergeant savagely.

Instead of one look of pity, the painted renegade burst into a hearty laugh, and at last said:

"Well, this is good; you, Maurice Sylvester, have at last done that which is a crime; ha! ha! ha! it is too good to be believed."

"So you, like myself, are an outlaw?"

"Yes, I am a fugitive, to save my life."

"Give me your hand on it."

"No, I will not touch your hand."

"You fear the red stains upon it? well, so be it, I have not forgotten that your hand brought death—"

"No! no! no! do not recall that act, Moline, for well you know that—" cried the sergeant in a tone of anguish, which was interrupted with: "I know nothing but that you did the deed; but tell me, where were you going when my lariat checked you?"

"To seek you."

"Ha! to join me, now that the brand of outlaw is upon you?"

"To seek you, and ask you to resume that brand; to let me say from you, who and what you are, and that I was not a deserter, not a renegade, only sought to meet you."

"I shall do nothing of the kind, sir: you are here, and here you shall remain as one of the band that wars upon our own race."

"Oh God!" and the sergeant staggered back against a tree, as though about to fall; but suddenly recovering himself he uttered a wild cry and sprung upon the man before him, with a determination to kill him, blazing in his dark eyes.

CHAPTER XXIV.

WORSE THAN DEATH.

THE man upon whom the sergeant had so suddenly sprung, and seemingly with the frenzy of despair and hatred was strangely like him in form, for they were of the same size, though the renegade seemed to be possessed of greater quickness of action, and tougher sinew, caused by the hardy life he led.

Though taken by surprise by the unexpected act, he met the attack with a nerve and cour-

age that showed he was ever on his guard, and releasing, by a severe blow, the grasp of the sergeant upon his throat, he clinched with him, and the fight became savage and determined.

Though both men were armed, strange to say, neither seemed to care to use a weapon, but each struggled for the mastery of the other by sheer strength.

In this contest the renegade soon showed his superiority, for he seemed to possess sinews of steel and a power of endurance that knew not fatigue, and the sergeant was soon powerless in his strong grasp and ceased to struggle.

"Well, Maurice, you see that I am still your master," said the renegade.

The soldier made no reply, and only gazed with a strange look into the painted face of the other.

"Well the worm will turn if trod on, I see, so I must look out that I get not a stab in the back."

"I am not so vile as that, Moline. I was frenzied at your words, and sprung upon you, hardly knowing what I did; but you need not fear me now, for I would not have your life upon my hands for worlds."

"I shall not trust you, so that you can repent of such a sin, my dear Maurice. Now come, let us resume where we left off."

"I was saying that you must become like myself, a renegade."

"Never!"

"That is a strong word, and is too often used unadvisedly, as it is in this case, for not only shall you become as I am, but you shall aid in placing the garrison in my hands."

"The tortures of the Inquisition cannot force me to do that."

"We shall see."

"Ay, you shall see, Moline, that I will not be like you, the vilest of the vile, to save my life with the hope of making you confess that I was no renegade. I escaped and I sought you."

"Now that I know that you refuse, I will go far from here and win a name of honor for myself, which my child shall not blush to own."

"Your child?" cried the renegade, quickly.

"Yes; my daughter Sibyl."

"The child of your wife?" asked the renegade in a hoarse voice.

"Yes."

"I thought that your wife died in giving birth to a daughter, who soon after followed her mother to the grave."

The sergeant turned deadly pale and made no reply, and the renegade continued in the same suppressed voice, that showed he was deeply moved:

"You have deceived me in this, Maurice Sylvester."

"Yes, I confess it," was the reply.

"And your wife, where is she?"

"In her grave."

"She died, then, as you stated?"

"No, only a short while ago."

"Ah! And her child?"

"Why would you know?"

"Answer me. Where is your child?"

"In the Platte garrison."

"Ha! When did you bring her there?"

"She came in the train that you attacked."

"Ha! ha! ha! what a fine father she must feel that she has in you, to be tried as a deserter and renegade upon her arrival, and now be a fugitive from justice."

"I tell you, Maurice, you shall answer for this deception."

"No, no, spare me, for I know what you would do."

"What would I do?"

"Betray the past to my child."

"That is just what I will do, unless you betray the garrison into my hands."

"I will not do it."

"Listen: there is a man in that garrison whom I hate, for he has wronged one in the past whom I love, after my fashion of loving."

"Who is he?"

"Horace Eldred."

"The commandant?"

"Yes, Colonel Eldred; he captured me once, and held me under death sentence; but I escaped, by the aid of the very one whose whip-o-will call made you leave the bivouac the other night."

"It matters not who she is, but I have promised her to avenge her wrongs, and I wish to get Horace Eldred in my power; and more, I would humble his lovely daughter in the dust."

"Why wrong that beautiful, innocent girl, Moline?"

"Beautiful, innocent girl," answered the renegade mockingly.

"I tell you, Maurice, I have a debt to settle with her, and I shall pay it to the last farthing."

"You have aught against Edna Eldred?"

"Yes."

"How can she have wronged you?"

"It matters not to you; but I will get her father and herself in my power, and then my revenge shall be complete on both; but you must aid me."

"I shall not."

"Then I act without you, and from this day you shall curse the day that you were born."

Suddenly he gave the loud call of the whip-

o-will, and to the amazement of the sergeant a score of red horsemen came bounding toward him.

"Secure that man, and bring him along," was the stern command in the Comanche tongue, and quickly it was obeyed.

Mounted upon his horse, and bound securely Maurice Sylvester was borne along over prairie and hill, across streams, and down valleys, until at nightfall the renegade chief and his red band halted in a mountainous, wild region, so formed by nature as to be a safe retreat for wild beasts, and doubly safe for the human beings, fallen to the level of brutes, who had there their lair.

"Take that man to the Death cave, and there leave him," was the stern command of the renegade chief, and Maurice Sylvester was borne away to a cavern, before the entrance of which were stout logs securely barring within the unfortunate prisoner that was placed there.

Stripped of half his clothing, with a bear-skin and army blanket only thrown him for couch and covering, and no hope of release, he was left there, with the renegade's last words ringing in his ears:

"Maurice Sylvester, you know well what another year will bring to me, and for which I have so long plotted; and now know, that I have one in Platte Garrison who will aid me to carry out my revenge against Horace Eldred and his daughter, and that then, I shall get in my power your sweet child, and prove to her that you are not her father."

CHAPTER XXV.

THE FALSE MESSENGER.

WHEN Esther Gerard mounted her spotted mustang to ride over to the garrison, she little dreamed of trouble to come.

In her new home, log-cabin though it was, and on the far frontier, she had found a contentment that she felt would soon bring happiness to both herself and her father, and was really glad that she had left the butterfly life of the city for that of a border girl.

Some of the emigrants who had come on the long trail West with them, were, like her father and herself, from the better walks of life, and with true courage had settled down to carve out new fortunes in that western land.

These were enjoyable companions, for both Esther and her father; but there were two others whom she liked very much, and wished to keep as friends, although they had become inmates of the garrison, some miles distant from her cabin home.

Edna Eldred, whom she had several times met, she also had become attached to, and wishing to see her, as well as the pretty widow and Sibyl Sylvester, she had galloped over to the fort, her father promising to come after her when his day's work was done.

Sibyl, the Child of the Regiment, deeply interested in what she heard in the commandant's office about Gold Spur and her father, returned no answer to Esther's knock at her door, and the fair emigrant then went in quest of the child widow, and with like disappointment.

Failing to find that capricious beauty, Esther sought the room of Edna Eldred, and was warmly welcomed by her.

"Come, let us go for a gallop, Miss Gerard, and make up a quartette of equestriennes, for we will get Mrs. Conrad and Sibyl, and not a beau shall accompany us," said Edna Eldred, after she had greeted her visitor.

Esther explained that she could not find either the Child of the Regiment or the widow, and the two started together, taking the trail leading to the cottonwood grove on the river-bank, and distant half a league or more from the fort.

Unsuspecting danger, and chatting in a lively strain, they reached the timber, and dismounted to pluck the wild flowers that grew in abundance near them.

At last, fatigued by their exertions, and satisfied with what they had gathered, they got down upon the river-bank to rest and enjoy the pretty scene and balmy air.

Presently they were startled by seeing a horseman approach, but were reassured when they discovered that he was a trooper in uniform.

"Some one doubtless sent after us, as father may be anxious regarding our safety," said Edna, as the cavalryman drew nearer.

"It was perhaps imprudent in us coming this far in these times of danger," answered Esther, and the two arose as the soldier approached and touched his cap.

"Well, my man, do you seek us?" asked Edna, in that manner and tone that the feminine relatives of army officers soon acquire in addressing a soldier.

"Yes, miss, a few friends have ridden on to the Horseshoe Motte above on the river, and beg you to come there."

"Our friends: oh, Mrs. Conrad and Miss Sylvester you mean; well, Esther, they have stolen a march on us after all," said Edna.

"Yes, miss," replied the soldier hesitatingly, and then he added:

"There were two ladies, miss."

"Do you not know Mrs. Conrad, my man?"

"Not by name, miss."

"And the Child of the Regiment you certainly know?"

"Yes, miss, she was one of the ladies, but I am one of the late recruits."

"Ah yes; I thought I did not know your face, and yet it seems familiar," and turning to Esther she added *sotto voce*:

"What a splendid-looking officer he would make."

"Indeed he would, with his English whiskers and light hair," answered that other admirer of masculine beauty; but seeing that the soldier noticed their whispering together, Edna asked:

"Are you to act as an escort, my man, to the Horseshoe Motte?"

"Yes, miss; I was told to."

"Then lead the way, for we will mount."

With a kind of natural gallantry he sprung to the ground, untied their horses for them and placed them in the saddle with an air of deference that was quite winning, and then lightly leaping to his own saddle with no apparent desire to show his athletic ability, he led the way up the river at a swift gallop.

"What can have induced that silly couple to ride so far?" said Edna, after a league had been gone over, and the motte was yet nearly as far away.

"They were certainly rash, but if there was danger this soldier would certainly have warned them," answered Esther, and they continued their rapid gallop until the timber was reached and they dashed into its cool shade.

Then suddenly their guide wheeled to the right-about, his well trained horse bounded between the ponies ridden by the two maidens, upon whose bridle-reins was now laid a firm grasp.

"Sir, what does this mean?" cried Edna, indignantly.

"It means, fair lady, that you are both my captives," was the insulting rejoinder.

"Your captives! My father shall learn of this outrage, sir! Unloose my rein," and Edna's eyes flashed with anger.

"Your father, Edna Eldred, fears me far more than I do him," was the quiet answer.

"Ha! you are not what you represented yourself: you are—"

"The White Jackal!"

With the cry that burst from the lips of the terror-stricken maidens, at this startling announcement, there appeared upon all sides of them red warriors in full war-paint, and rising, as if by magic, from the very ground.

CHAPTER XXVI.

THE RENEGADE'S RUSE.

WHEN Colonel Eldred started off in pursuit of the White Jackal, that had been seen to carry off Edna Eldred and Esther Gerard as captives, he was in deadly earnest to run the renegade to earth, and visit upon him a most complete revenge.

Already, without waiting for orders, Major Giles Gregory, the veteran old soldier and bachelor, had started in pursuit, and they were making the pace hot for the fugitives, who had not gained the start they had hoped for.

Finding, from a personal observation with his glass, from the top of a knoll, that not only was the major's battalion pressing him hard, and not two leagues distant, but that far in the rear was visible a second body of troopers, the man in soldier's uniform, who had so cleverly deceived and kidnapped the two maidens, determined upon a piece of strategy, so he headed his force for a line of hills, as if to take shelter there.

This point he reached in safety, and at once had fires built, and other preparations made for encamping, apparently, at the same time showing his warriors in force, so as to convince the troopers that he intended to make a fight.

Seeing this, and not wishing to venture a combat, with his commander only a few miles in his rear, Major Giles came to a halt on the prairie, and made preparations to begin the fight as soon as the reinforcements arrived.

In the mean time the renegade leader of the Indians had gained a short rest for his tired horses, and water and grass being plentiful, he soon decided upon his plans of action.

Dismounting some of his best warriors, he threw them out as an advance guard, with orders to keep the enemy in check for awhile, and then retreat to the hills, and thus make their way to the stronghold, which they could easily do, being on foot.

As soon as he felt that he had tarried long enough, he approached the two maidens, who, pale and anxious, were seated together upon a log, their hands clasping each other's, and silently bemoaning their fate.

"Well, ladies, we will continue our ride now," he said, politely.

"Oh, sir, where would you take us?" cried Esther Gerard, anxiously.

"To the retreat of my band."

"And why have you thus wronged us?" asked Edna, indignantly.

"I am the wronged one, lady; life owed me a fair living, and giving it not to me, I sought to take it, and I am called an outlaw for it, and am hunted down by my fellow-men; but with

you in my power I can get terms from even your haughty father, Miss Eldred, I think; if not—"

"Well, sir, if not?"

"We shall see what will be the result; come, let me aid you to mount."

Resistance both knew would be worse than useless, and they were raised to their saddles, and the band moved on once more, both maidens realizing how cleverly the renegade had deceived the soldiers by his action, for the troopers were preparing for a general attack upon the hills.

As they got miles away they heard the firing brought on by the few warriors left to deceive the soldiers, and then came the cheers of the men as they charged upon a foe, that they soon found had fled, and even those who had laid several of their comrades low, could nowhere be found in the fastnesses of the hills.

With night upon them and no trail visible, the soldiers, with bitter denunciations, were compelled to camp; for the exact spot of the renegade chief's retreat was not even known to Buckskin Mose, an individual who was supposed to know every foot of land between the Missouri and Arkansas rivers.

The rest, food and water having greatly benefited the ponies of the Indians, they held on through the night, until the renegade chief saw that the fair captives were utterly prostrated with fatigue, and then he came to a halt, and made them a comfortable wicky-up into which they crept with delight at the chance of rest.

But at dawn, after a frugal repast, they were again in the saddle, and once having gained the wild regions where the Indians held their retreat, both Edna and Esther were in almost despair, for they saw that to take them by force would be next to impossible, even with treble the numbers the garrison and settlement could send to their succor.

"Here, ladies, is your home for the present, and you will have every attention shown you that can be shown in my wild retreat in the hills."

"Though you may not see your guards, I warn you that their eyes are upon you, so for your own sake keep near this cabin, and what you need this person will supply you with."

The renegade pointed as he spoke to a woman who stood near the humble little cabin that had been assigned to them.

It was the same dark-faced, handsome woman, who, in her specter-like disguise, had led Sergeant Sylvester into the Indian camp.

With a bow the renegade walked away, an Indian warrior having taken the two tired horses of the maidens, and with despair at their hearts, when they glanced into the merciless face of the woman, the two wretched captives threw themselves down upon the velvety grass and burst into tears, for life then held for them no hope.

CHAPTER XXVII.

THE LOST TRAIL.

With the first gray of dawn in the east, Colonel Eldred had every man under his command up and ready for the start.

All through the night he had been utterly wretched, for the clever ruse of the renegade, he had discovered, as soon as the troopers had charged the hill and found the enemy gone.

Instead of having halted to make a fight, for the hills were believed to be one of the retreats of the red band, he had simply stopped to gain a rest for his horses, and hold his foes in check, until night came on to hide his retreat.

One solitary Indian, a Dog Soldier Sioux, had been found by the troopers, wounded, and unable to fly, on account of a shot in the foot.

He had defended himself well, but been overpowered and taken alive, and then an effort was made to force him to lead on after his comrades.

All entreaties he refused, and then Buckskin Mose tried threats.

"Ef yer tell us, Injun, ther trail yer devilish brothers tuk, I'll be yer friend, an' call yer pard, while ther kernul here, will give yer a dozen ponies."

"No, me no tell," answered the warrior in English.

"Then I'll scalp yer alive ef yer don't, and kill yer inch by inch."

"Me no tell."

"I'll scalp yer durned greasy head, I say if yer don't."

The Indian smiled sadly but shook his head.

"Does yer mean it?" and Buckskin Mose took hold of the scalp-lock, as the brave red-skin lay wounded upon the ground.

"No be bad Injun," was the firm reply.

All stood around, anxiously awaiting the result, for darkness was now almost upon them, and Colonel Eldred said sternly:

"If you do not lead us on the trail of your comrades, I will have you killed."

"Trail over hill yonder," replied the Indian.

"True; but when it is dark, a coyote cannot find it," said The Hercules, at the same time stepping forward and placing a revolver at the head of the warrior, who never flinched.

"Waal, thet red-skin are too much fer me,

and I'd not hurt him, I'll sw'ar," muttered Buckskin Mose, turning away.

"Well I will, if he refuses to tell; quick, red-skin, will you lead us on the trail?"

"No lead pale-face on red-man trail."

"Then you shall die," and the revolver was cocked and pressed against the brawny breast over the heart.

The Indian never flinched; but from his lips broke in wild accents his defiant death-song, to be suddenly ended by the smothered report of the revolver, and a whoop of hatred, as, wounded though he was, he bounded to his feet, and then fell back dead.

"Good God! Hale, why did you do that cruel act?" cried Riley Rockwell, turning angrily upon The Hercules, who stood upright, the smoking revolver in his hand, and a sinister smile upon his lips.

"It were a coward act, ef it were done ag'in' an Injun, and yer does w'ar shoulder-straps," said Buckskin Mose, indignantly, and The Hercules turned savagely upon him, when Colonel Eldred, who had walked away a few paces, suddenly confronted him.

"Lieutenant Hale, did you deliberately kill that Indian?"

The Hercules had intended to first brave out his act, but seeing that not one present but censured the merciless deed, the cruel smile upon his lips changed, and he replied:

"No, Colonel Eldred, my finger unwittingly touched the trigger."

"As an officer and gentleman, sir, I am compelled to take your word; but be careful in future, when your nerve cannot be depended upon, how you fool with dangerous weapons."

The face of The Hercules flushed with anger, but he made no reply, and turned away even unheeding the remark of Buckskin Mose:

"Thet were ther durndest lie I ever heered, ef Hercules Hale did say so."

With darkness upon them the troopers had but one thing to do, and they sought rest; but, though many a stalwart form was wrapped in his blanket in apparent sleep, had their faces been scanned closely the eyes would have been discovered to be wide open, for their thoughts were with the captive maidens and the events the morrow must bring, for to hunt the White Jackal in his den all knew was no light work.

After a sleepless night, in which the greater part of the time had been spent in council with his officers, the colonel and wretched father called the men up, and the start on the trail began.

But though it seemed plain enough, leading through the hills for a mile, it suddenly broke off at a canyon, and no trace of it could be found.

In vain was it that Buckskin Mose used every artifice known to bordermen to discover the missing trail; nowhere could it be found.

It stopped in the canyon, and, though half a dozen paths led out of it, not one was there a trace upon of a large force having gone by it.

"I tell yer, kernul, thet feller has traveled over riyers, and with muffled hoofs, and it are just a question which one o' these trails he hev tuk and how far it are ter whar ther critters hev left the'r tracks ag'in," said Buckskin Mose, going up and joining Colonel Eldred, where he stood with Major Gregory and Captain Rockwell, conversing earnestly together.

"Well, Mose, what are we to do about it?" asked the colonel.

"Send a man, who knows a trail when he sees it, up each outlet from this canyon, and let him continue on until he finds whar ther critters hev hed thar hoofs unmuffled; then let him come back hell-ter-split and tell ther news. I, fer one, will take ther leetle glen leadin' to the south'ard."

"Do so, and pick your men for the other paths; but who is that, Mose?"

All eyes were turned in the direction indicated, and saw The Hercules approaching with a man whom no one seemed to know.

As he drew nearer it was seen that he had long white hair and beard, and his parchment-like skin was seamed with wrinkles as though he had nearly reached four-score years.

His gait was slow, but firm, and that he was a borderman was evident from his dress of buckskin and dressed skins of wild beasts.

A fox-skin cap with the bushy tail hanging down his back, a rifle, old and worn, and a pair of serviceable revolvers and horn-handled knife, completed his attire and accouterments.

As he approached every eye was upon him, and The Hercules said in explanation:

"Colonel Eldred, I met this man up the canyon and he desires to speak with you, sir."

"Are you the commandant?" asked the stranger, his voice husky and tremulous.

"Yes; and you are—"

"The Hermit of the Republican," was the calm reply.

"Indeed! I have long heard of you, sir, as dwelling alone on the Republican, and I am at this time particularly glad to meet you," said the colonel.

"I have come, sir, to lead you on the trail of the White Jackal, for he has gone on to his retreat, and in his power are two fair captives, whom doubtless you seek."

"Ha! you saw them then?"

"Yes, they passed near me to-day; I am ready to lead you to the Jackal's lair."

The announcement caused universal satisfaction, excepting with Buckskin Mose, who muttered:

"I doesn't take stock in thet ole sinner, an' I intend ter keep my optics on him, an' ef thar comes a shot from a bush on ther trail, ther Repub won't hev no Hermit nary more."

With this threat Mose went to the fort, and the command moved off on the trail, led by the old Hermit.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

THE MIDNIGHT VISITOR.

TRUE to his determination Buckskin Mose kept close to the old Hermit, ever watching him with the eye of an eagle, and waiting for the first sign of treachery to there end his life, for the scout had heard that the red-skins never interfered with the aged and solitary hunter, and feared that he might at heart be a renegade and was leading them all into a trap.

A few miles from where they had camped, the broad trail of the Indian band came in view and the Hermit followed it on foot, and at a pace one would not suspect of a man of his years.

At last they came to a valley through which wound a rapid stream, and across this the trail led, while beyond were the fastnesses of the hills where the Hermit said was the retreat of the White Jackal and those of the Indian tribes who followed his lead.

Crossing the stream, considerably in advance of the command, the Hermit and Buckskin Mose halted at the foot of a steep hill, which in several places was intersected with canyons.

Here the Indian trail divided into tracks going in all directions, and the Hermit suggested to the scout that they should search for the well-known hoof-marks of the ponies ridden by the two maidens.

This Buckskin Mose readily agreed to, and the two began the search, the scout bearing to the right, some distance from the Hermit.

Presently his quick eye detected the tracks of the army-shod animals that he knew Edna and Esther were mounted upon, and he called to his companion.

But no answer came, and he walked quickly to the spot where he had last seen him.

A small stick, to which was fastened a piece of paper, caught his eye, and seizing it, he handed it to Colonel Eldred, who just then rode up with Riley Rockwell.

"Ther Hermit has got, kernul, but hes left yer this keerd."

"The Hermit gone! why, surely a man of his years cannot be far away," cried the colonel.

"He might be durned near, and we not find him in this pesky place."

"Rockwell, call the men to the front, and I will have search for him."

"Perhaps he may tell yer whar he are in thet paper, kernul, for thar is writin' marks onto it, I sees, yet not knowin' readin' I can't git ther figgers down adzactly."

The colonel eagerly glanced at the card, and read, written in a bold hand:

"Having led Colonel Eldred to the retreat of the White Jackal and his band, nothing more can be done by
THE HERMIT OF THE REPUBLICAN."

"Well, this is remarkable; what do you make of it, gentlemen?" and Colonel Eldred turned to the major and several other officers who just then rode up and learned of what had occurred.

"I know not what to say, sir; he certainly has led us to the right place, for here the trail breaks," answered the major.

"Yes, this is the very spot for the retreat of the outlaw," remarked Captain Rockwell.

"Do you notice nothing peculiar in this handwriting, Colonel Eldred?" asked The Hercules, who was examining the card critically.

"No, and yet it has a familiar look, I must say, Hale."

"It is the same, sir, as that in which the reward for your scalp was offered, and the Texas Ranger poem," was the significant reply of The Hercules.

"By the Lord Harry! you are right, Hale; the Hermit, then, is none other than The Gentleman from Texas, according to your ideas?"

"True, Colonel Eldred, and the White Jackal himself is one of his numerous disguises."

All started at the bold assertion of The Hercules, for it fell like a thunderbolt upon them.

But Captain Rockwell asked:

"Why did he, if he was, as you say, the White Jackal in disguise, bring us right to his own retreat?"

"He is a man of deep plots, captain, and may, at this moment, have the entire command almost at his mercy," replied The Hercules, and his words created an immediate stir, which was increased when Colonel Eldred, acting wholly on a standpoint of safety for his men, ordered the command to fall back from the immediate vicinity and go into camp.

Hardly had this order been given, and the officers been summoned to the colonel's presence for a council of war, when Buckskin Mose reported a party of horsemen in sight.

At once all was excitement in the bivouac, for, with the bands of Old Whistle and Two Lance, noted Indian chiefs, at the beck and call of the White Jackal, none knew at what time an overwhelming force of red-skins, led by the renegade leader, might be hurled upon the troopers.

But the field glasses soon dispelled all dread, as the approaching horsemen were discovered to be some of their own regiment, and shortly after Lieutenant Emmerson dashed up with a half a score of his cavalymen at his back.

"Nothing wrong at the garrison I hope, Emmerson," cried the colonel anxiously.

"No, sir; only Captain Moreland thought it best that I should come and report to you what had occurred," and the lieutenant made known the coming into the garrison of Gold Spur, his daring escape, and the chase, not forgetting to add that his sister, the beautiful widow, had fired upon The Gentleman from Texas, and missed him, and having little to say regarding the Child of the Regiment, other than that she had joined in the chase, and with Clarice Conrad, had been the only one to overtake the fugitive horseman.

"And with your picked horses, Emmerson, you were distanced in the chase?" asked the colonel.

"Yes, sir; his Featherhoof, as Gold Spur calls his matchless horse, was not fully in a run, it seemed to me, and is as wonderful a brute as his master is a man."

"I believe you, and I would give much to solve the mystery attending the man, and find out if he is really what The Hercules says he is, no other than this renegade chief The Jackal," remarked Colonel Eldred in a puzzled way, and the council of officers was again called, and all the facts of the case laid before them, and plans proposed for the attack upon the arch renegade and his band of red fiends.

Numerous were the suggestions proposed, and rejected, until at last Buckskin Mose made a proposal in his quaint way, for he was one of the council.

"I tell yer, pards, and kernul," he began, "ther way ter do ister let me go on a leetle trail ahead, an' find out jist whar ther camp o' ther renegades is located; then I'll come back, an' ther whole durned lot o' us kin take ther trail about three hours afore daybreak, an' go on foot, leavin' on'y 'nuff sogers ter guard ther critters."

"We kin slip out o' camp, same as a feller does when his gal hes skipt home out o' church with ther toothache, an' we'll go quiet like, and surprise ther outlaw gerloots, who'll be lookin' fer us ter come on ther outside o' our critters."

"But sailin' in as we does on footback, we kin jist give 'em a surprise party as will mak' 'em howl Jerusha! Isn't I talking Gospil sense, kernul?"

"I think you are right, Mose, if you can only find some way to strike their camp without their guards discovering us," remarked the commandant.

"You jist trust me fer thet; now go inter camp, as calm-like as ef yer were livin' hour, an' I'll be back arter it are dark, an' let yer know jist what are ter be did, and how far yer sogers has ter foot it."

This advice was considered good, especially as no one had any better to suggest, and Buckskin Mose was a man whom all had perfect confidence in.

The consequence was that the scout left the camp by a roundabout way, the horses were picketed out, the guards were placed, and the camp-fires lighted and every indication was that the troopers had halted for a stay of some time.

Gradually night came on, and one by one the tired men and officers sought rest, for they knew that they would be called upon for the secret march before morning, and desired to forget fatigue, dread and care in slumber if it could be done.

All preparations were quickly made, the detail to remain with the horses had been informed of the duty to devolve upon them, and the attacking party had been informed of what was their mission, and, at the suggestion of several scouts had wrapped their heavy cavalry boots with pieces of blanket, to deaden the sound of their footfalls on the march.

Unable to sleep, with the uncertain fate of his beautiful daughter ever crowding upon him, Colonel Eldred paced to and fro before the wicky-up hastily prepared for his accommodation.

At length, as the hours crept on toward midnight, more and more anxious for the coming of the scout, Buckskin Mose, and dreading that harm had befallen him, he extended his walk toward the edge of the timber, in which his camp was.

For a moment or two he stood in silence, listening to the horses cropping the juicy grass, and occasionally the howl of some wolf, or sharp bark of a coyote, when suddenly he felt a heavy hand laid upon his shoulder, and against his temple was pressed the cold muzzle of a revolver.

"Move one inch, or utter one cry, and you are a dead man!"

There was no mistaking the tone of the speaker, and that he was a foe, in the lines of an enemy, was sufficient to prove that he made no idle threat.

Colonel Horace Eldred was a brave man, and one seldom caught off his guard; but he was also a man of remarkably good sound sense, and he remained as still as a statue, and spoke no word, for he had no desire to test the truth of the speaker's utterance.

"Ah! you are Colonel Eldred; I did not at first know you, and I am glad we are so well met, for I came here to see you," said the stranger, still holding the muzzle of his revolver hard against the head of the commandant, who replied in a low, cool tone:

"Yes, I am Colonel Eldred; who are you and what do you wish with me?"

"What I wish with you, Colonel Eldred, you shall soon know; would you know who I am, I will simply say that I am *The Gentleman from Texas*."

CHAPTER XXIX.

A STRANGE PROPOSAL.

"THE GENTLEMAN FROM TEXAS?" exclaimed Colonel Eldred, speaking the strange name of the mysterious man after him.

"Yes, sir. I hope that I have not been forgotten so soon," was the cool rejoinder.

"By no means, sir; you manage to keep yourself in remembrance."

"Lower your voice, please, Colonel Eldred, for I wish no observers of our interview, and as I do not wish to stand in such a hostile attitude to you, kindly give me your word that you will not betray my presence here, and we will converse on equal terms."

The officer hesitated, for he was now assured that he was in the presence of a man who could be no other than the White Jackal.

Seeing this hesitation, The Gentleman from Texas said:

"Colonel Eldred, I mean to serve you, not to harm you or yours, and I request the promise that you will not betray me while I am here."

"I can do no other than give it."

"Thank you; now let me tell you frankly that the show of force you have here will not influence the Jackal—"

"Yourself you mean," sneered the colonel.

"I said the White Jackal, sir, and I repeat it, you cannot influence him to give up the fair captives he has in his power."

"Great God! do you mean to say that that fiend would keep those innocent girls captive, and—"

"He is a man that will follow the bent of his humor, let it lead him where it may, and knowing this, I have sought you to offer my aid in releasing your daughter and Miss Gerard."

"First tell me how you got into my lines?"

"I came through the space between your guards, sir."

"I shall have them punished for—"

"Hold, sir! it is not their fault, for they did not see me, as I have a habit of moving like a snake when need be."

"Doubtless you exercise the habit at all times."

"You may sneer, sir, but I forgive it, as you seem determined to feel that I have wronged you in some way; but now to the cause of my coming here."

"Tell me, were you the one that brought us here in the guise of an old man, calling himself the Hermit of the Republican?"

"Why do you suspect me of being other than I profess to be?" was the evasive reply.

"Because I feel confident that you are."

"You may one day find that you are mistaken, sir; now let me tell you that there is but one way for you to rescue your daughter and Miss Gerard."

"And that is?"

"Through me."

"I prefer to try my own way," was the haughty reply.

"It will do no good. The Jackal outnumbers you now in men, and you know how desperately his red-skins fight, while to take his retreat in the hills, would be impossible with ten times your force."

"We shall see, sir."

"I can see now, sir, what you refuse to admit; why, I know that you are now waiting the return of your very excellent scout and guide, Buckskin Mose."

The colonel started, but remained silent, and The Gentleman from Texas continued:

"My dear colonel, Buckskin Mose went off in high hopes of finding a way through the lines of the Jackal; but he is now bound hand and foot, a prisoner."

"By Heaven! do you speak the truth?"

"I do, sir."

"He is in the power of the Jackal?"

"No, sir."

"You said he was a prisoner."

"So he is, but to me."

"To you."

"Yes, for I simply captured him, and left him in a snug place until I saw you."

"And then, sir?"

"I will release him, for he is necessary in bringing about the exchange I intend."

"The exchange?"

"Yes, Colonel Eldred, for I intend to offer myself to the Jackal, in exchange for Miss Eldred and her friend."

"I confess, sir, that you speak in riddles to me."

"I will explain: the Jackal has two valuable prizes with which to bring you to his terms; but there is one more in his eyes that is far more valuable, and that one is *myself*."

"Why, sir, I believe *you* to be the Jackal himself."

"Time will show, sir, whether you are right, or I wronged by your suspicion; but I offer now to go and bring Buckskin Mose to you, and you can send him under a truce flag, to the Jackal, as soon as it is daylight, and make a proposition to him."

"Well, sir, what is it?"

"Tell him that you have in your power Gold Spur, of Texas, whom you will deliver up to him in return for his two lady captives."

"And he will make the exchange?"

"Most gladly."

"Why should he?"

"Ah! therein lies a secret known to the Jackal and myself only."

"You are a most mysterious man."

"I am here, sir, to clear up a mystery; but do you accept my offer?"

"I certainly can do nothing else; but what will be your fate, if you are surrendered to the Jackal, taking you with the idea that you are not the man himself?"

"It matters not, sir; simply let Buckskin Mose seek the chief and tell him that you have me in your power, doomed to death, and that I will be executed, unless he gives up the two captives, and he will gladly relinquish his hold upon them to save me."

"You are a most remarkable man, Gold Spur, or whatever you may call yourself."

"Thank you, Colonel Eldred; but do you accept my offer?"

"I do."

"Then I will return with Buckskin Mose within half an hour," and, like a shadow, the strange man glided away in the forest.

CHAPTER XXX.

THE HOSTAGE.

FOR some moments after the departure of The Gentleman from Texas, Colonel Eldred paced to and fro in the deepest meditation.

Then he bitterly censured himself for not having raised the alarm and captured the daring man, saying angrily:

"I was a fool to believe his strange story; he only wished to spy out our actions from some motive, and has gained his end, and may even now be moving upon us with his red skins, for somehow I cannot shake off the idea that he is really the Jackal."

"I will speak to Gregory and Rockwell upon the matter."

He walked hastily to where those two officers were lying asleep, their cloaks and serapes wrapped around them, and quietly awoke them.

Silently they arose and followed him, and going to the spot where he had had the interview with Gold Spur, he told them all that had occurred.

"I do not believe it, colonel, for Buckskin Mose is no man to be caught napping, and he is a giant for strength," said the major.

"Yet the Texan handled The Hercules with ease, major."

"True; but Mose is as cunning as an Indian; besides, what motive can the fellow have in coming here to give himself up to you, to serve as a hostage for the Jackal's captives?"

This remark of the major seemed unanswerable, and the more the three officers talked over the matter, the more they were puzzled, and at last stood silently together, neither knowing what to propose or say.

"I cannot believe that Mose was captured by any man," said Riley Rockwell after awhile.

"You is off thar, pard, fer I were tuk in slick as fallin' off a log."

All started at the well-known voice of the scout, and beheld Buckskin Mose standing almost in their midst, having apparently risen from the ground.

And he was not alone, for by his side was the tall, elegant form of The Gentleman from Texas.

Like phantoms they had glided to the spot, and suddenly confronted the officers.

"I am back, Colonel Eldred," said the deep voice of the Texan.

"So I see, sir. Well, Mose, what means this?"

"It means, kernul, thet I went off with good intentions, but I mistuk, fer, as I was creepin' along around a rock, with everything lovely in my mind, I suddenly felt myself in a grip thet would hold the leg o' a kickin' Government mule."

"This gent are ther one who hed me, an' I soon found out it wa'n't no use rastlin', an' I g'in in, throw'd up my hand and passed."

"You were taken prisoner, you mean."

"That are Gospil, kernul, fer I was tied tighter than ther knot o' matrimony in less than

a minute, and the result were that I lay quiet as Mary's little lamb y'er reads of in Scriptur, 'til this gent from Texas comed back from somewhere, an' said as how I was wanted.

"I cumed with him, and he shows me how ter come through our own lines 'thout sturbin' ther guards, an' here we is."

"So I see. Now, sir, repeat your offer, for I have spoken to these gentlemen of it," and Colonel Eldred turned to The Gentleman from Texas, who said quietly, addressing the major, Riley Rockwell and Mose more particularly:

"I have told Colonel Eldred that force with the Jackal would end in his defeat, and have proposed, as the only way to free the captives, to allow him to send Buckskin Mose in under a flag of truce, telling the chief that Gold Spur, of Texas, is doomed to die, and offering to give him up in exchange for Miss Eldred and Miss Gerard."

"And you think he will do this?" asked Riley Rockwell.

"I know that he will."

"What are you to him?" was the blunt query of the major.

"Enough for him to make the exchange," was the evasive answer.

"I b'lieve yer, pard; but who are I ter see in ther renegade camp?"

"The chief."

"Durnation! I thought you was ther Jackal."

"If I am held here as a hostage I certainly cannot be the renegade chief."

"Thet are true. All right, I are willin' ter go, kernul, so tell me what I hes ter do."

"This Gentleman from Texas will give you your orders."

"Waal, spit 'em out, myster'us pard."

"At daylight you can enter the hills, carrying a white flag on a stick above your head. When met by the Indian guard ask to see the chief, and he will take you to him."

"Tell him that Gold Spur, of Texas, is in the hands of Colonel Eldred, doomed to die for assisting the escaping Sergeant Sylvester the deserter, and that he will be surrendered to him in exchange for Miss Eldred and Miss Gerard. That is all, scout."

"I starts at onst, so as ter lose no time, an' ef my scalp gets tuk I dies in a good cause. Hes anybody got a white noser?"

"A what, Mose?" answered Riley Rockwell.

"A noser, a trumpet twister, a—"

"Oh! a handkerchief! yes, take mine," and the young officer held forth his fine linen kerchief.

"Or mine, Mose," and the major also offered his handkerchief.

"Guess not, major, fer ther reds might take yourn fer a black flag an' let in on me. Seein' as ther captain's is as clean as a lawyer's conscience I'll take it and run chances; but, kernul, ef thet Gent from Texas is sendin' me whar my ha'r will get tuk, jist string him up an' pronounce a benediction over my bones."

And without another word Buckskin Mose shouldered his rifle and strode away in the darkness, while Gold Spur turned to Colonel Eldred and said, calmly:

"I am your prisoner, sir, and surrender my wrists for the irons, if so you wish it."

"I am constrained to put you in irons, sir, as a more dangerous man, I must admit, I never had to deal with. Captain, take charge of this Gentleman from Texas, and if he attempts to escape, kill him."

CHAPTER XXXI.

THE MISSION.

EDNA ELDRÉD and Esther Gerard had not seen their captor, since he had placed them under the charge of the Mexican woman, and all their efforts to elicit information from her signally failed.

What was to be their fate they knew not, and that an attack of the troops to rescue them, they could not but see would meet with only defeat, as the position of the renegade's retreat was so well chosen even their eyes could discover its great strength from natural advantages, not to speak of the savage defenders.

Their cabin was far from uncomfortable, they were not by any means starved, for the Mexican woman gave them the best food that could be obtained, and apparently, they had their freedom, but were well aware that keen eyes were upon their every movement when they left the cabin.

Often had they questioned the Mexican regarding the strange chief, a white man who had allied himself with Indians against his own people, and become more cruel than the cruellest savage of his band, if all reports concerning him were true.

But she would answer only that he was a man who was at war with his race, and that was all they could get her to say.

Twice they had caught sight of other white men, or two whom they believed they recognized as such under their Indian paint; but of this they were not sure.

The morning of their third day of captivity, Edna and Esther were seated in front of the cabin, idly conjecturing what the day would bring forth, and the Mexican woman was inside attending to some household duty.

Suddenly Esther started to her feet and cried anxiously.

"Ah, Edna! see, they have Buckskin Mose a prisoner."

Coming toward the cabin was indeed the noted scout, but he carried upon his shoulder a long stick, at the end of which fluttered what was intended to be a small white flag.

But Buckskin Mose was not alone, as several Indians accompanied him, one of whom was evidently a chief from his dress and appearance.

Approaching the cabin, the supposed Indian chief led Mose up to where the maidens sat, most anxiously awaiting what would follow, and said in perfect English:

"Miss Eldred, do you know this man?"

Both girls were surprised at the question put in pure English, and a voice, they recognized as the same that had addressed them as a soldier in the cottonwood grove, and thus become their captor.

"Yes, he is known as Buckskin Mose, and is chief of scouts at the garrison," answered Edna and turning to the scout she continued:

"Ah, Mose, are you too a poor unfortunate like ourselves?"

"Nary unfort'nit, miss, for I are on special duty to try and get yer both out o' ther clutch o' this durned white Injun," was the bold response.

"Yes, Miss Eldred, the scout is here under a truce flag, to negotiate for the release of yourself and friend, for your father offers me fair terms for your restoration."

"My father, sir, is a poor man, with little else than his pay, and I regret that your cupidity is such as to force him to pay ransom for me."

"Pardon me, but there is no cupidity shown on my part, as money would not buy you; but he offers in exchange one whom I would give far more to get in my power, than even your sweet self," said the chief with sudden fierceness of manner, shaking his feathered head-dress as he spoke, like a horse would his mane.

"Ah! may I ask who this hostage is?" said Edna with a sneer, not believing the renegade.

"One whom you know as Gold Spur, the Texan, one whom I know under a different name."

"And what is this man to you?" asked Edna in surprise.

"Everything!"

The reply was in a savage tone that made both of the maidens start, and caused even the cool Buckskin Mose to look upon him and say:

"Yer doesn't seem ter love Texas, renegade pard."

"If you mean by Texas, the man Gold Spur, I hate him."

"Then he are a durned fool ter let yer get yer grip onto him, is what I says," remarked Mose.

"He would not, could he help it?"

"Wouldn't he? Waal, I thinks you is chin-nin' lies fer fun; but never mind, I is silent as a church organ on week-days, I is."

"What do you mean, scout?"

"Don't mean a durned thing; only, Texas are a durned fool ter let yer git yer grip onto him, lovin' him as yer seems ter."

"I say he would not, could he help it."

"Waal you oughter know, yer durned painted white Injun; but now ter biz; does yer give up them two putty gals fer Ther Gent from Texas?"

"Yes."

"Yer surrenders 'em ter me?"

"If you put Gold Spur in my hands."

"Go slow, renegade, fer ef I puts him in your grip, ye has ther gals and me too."

"I will send the ladies to the creek, half-way across the prairie, under two Indian warriors—"

"Come yerself, fer we'd be cheerful glad o' yer comp'ny."

Paying no attention to the invitation, the renegade chief continued:

"The ladies shall go under charge of the two warriors, whom I will order to kill them, should any effort be made to take them by treachery."

"Don't you chin about treachery, yer red-hearted white Injun," said Buckskin Mose fearlessly.

"There is more treachery under a white skin than a red one, scout."

"Waal, ef yer doesn't begin ter b'lieve yer are a Injun, crucify me fer a howlin' liar; yer is right, fer yer skin are white, and yer black heart are showin' through yer war-paint blacker than ther face o' any nigger from Afric's icy strand, as ther Doxology books says."

"We will discuss the cause of your coming here, scout, and not my character," sternly said the chief.

"Thet are so; I were a durned fool ter discuss what yer hesn't got; why you is—" but seeing a warning and entreating look from the maiden, Buckskin Mose continued:

"Waal, you is ready, yer say, fer biz?"

"Yes."

"I are ter return fer ther Gent from Texas?"

"Yes."

"And fetch him to the creek?"

"Yes, and in irons."

"In irons! is yer skeert o' him?"

"Yes, I know him."

"Waal, he are a tearer, if you isn't him; but he are so durned clever, I spects ter go back an' find he tuk tracks when I did, an' thet you is him."

The renegade smiled, and replied:

"I wish you to bring him in irons, and only one other than yourself need come to make the exchange."

"All right, I am willing."

"And Colonel Eldred is to return to the garrison without an attack upon me."

"Is them yer terms?"

"Yes."

"Guess ef we got ther gals we'd wipe yer out."

"I will surrender them only on the pledge of the colonel not to attack me."

"He'll give it, I sw'ar."

"Well, now return for the Texan, and at sunset, the ladies shall meet you at the creek in the prairie valley."

"Good! now I'll git," and with an awkward salute to the maidens, Buckskin Mose turned away, and accompanied by the Indian guards who had brought him there, started on his return to report the result of his mission.

CHAPTER XXXII.

GOLD SPUR ASKS A FAVOR.

It was certainly a very great relief to the mind of Colonel Eldred, and in fact to all his officers and men, for the mission of the scout had become known, when a sentinel reported Buckskin Mose in sight, and returning alone.

Anxiously then all awaited his approach, wondering what was the result, and if he had seen The Jackal.

His white flag he still carried on his shoulder, and upon drawing near to the encampment, and his face showing that he had good news, a wild cheer greeted him, as from one man.

"It seems that he has been successful in his mission, sir," and Colonel Eldred turned to the Texan, who with irons upon his ankles and wrists, was lying upon the grass near.

"I knew that he would be," was the quiet rejoinder.

A moment after Buckskin Mose drew near, and the colonel anxiously asked:

"Well, scout, what is the result?"

"Prime fer you an' ther gals, sir, but durned hard on Texas."

"What do you mean?"

"I seen ther Jackal, I guesses, onless thet are him, fer I are mixed, I sw'ar," and the scout glanced toward The Gentleman from Texas, who smiled.

"You saw the Jackal, you say?"

"I seen a white man, a durned fine-lookin' feller too, painted and togged up same as a Injun, an' he's ther chap as I did negotiate with."

"And he agrees to the exchange of my child and Miss Gerard, for this person?"

"I'm bettin' he do, an' he seem ter be all-fired glad of it, kernul."

"What did he say?"

"He said enough ter make me believe that he'd make it hot for Texas when he got his grip on him."

"Bah! he is not the Jackal, only one of his officers: this man is the renegade chief, and they are anxious to get him out of our clutches," said The Hercules.

"Is it not strange, sir, that I came and placed myself in your power?" calmly asked Gold Spur, and Colonel Eldred remarked:

"I am beginning to doubt the charge you so persistently adhere to, Hale, though I confess there is some strange mystery in it all."

"There is some trick in it all, as you will find out, sir," was the reply of The Hercules, and Colonel Eldred again turned to the scout:

"Well, scout, what else was said?"

"I had to pledge for you, that as soon as you got the gals, you was not to attack the band."

"Hal he demanded this, did he?"

"Yes kernul, but why I don't know, as it w'u'd be wuss nor nuthin' fer us ter attempt ter attack them Injuns whar they is: why I c'u'd lick a score o' sogers myself thar, an' they hes a leetle more men than we hes got."

"The fellow fooled you," insolently said The Hercules.

"I isn't such a fool as ter b'lieve thet one man kin be two men, an' in two dif'rent places at the same time, as you says o' ther Gent from Texas," was the sharp retort of the scout, and knowing the hot-headedness of the men when aroused, and wishing to avoid trouble, Colonel Eldred remarked sternly:

"Lieutenant Hale, I am in command of this expedition, and you pledged for me not to attack the renegades this time, scout?"

"Yas, kernul, an' I was doin' yer a favor in takin' ther pledge."

"And what arrangement did you make with this chief?"

"At sunset ther gals are ter be brought to ther creek in ther prairie valley, yonder, by two Injuns, an' me an' one other, whoever t'other is you is ter say, is ter take ther prisoner, and he are ter go in irons, as ther chief seemed a leetle skittish 'bout havin' him come ready fer biz."

"At sunset, you say?"

"Yas, kernul."

"Why not before?"

"Didn't ask no questions, when he agreed to terms."

"All right: Rockwell, I wish you to go with the scout and the prisoner; and you, Mr. Gold Spur, have heard the arrangement?" and the colonel turned to the prisoner, who answered calmly.

"I have heard all, sir, and am content; but there is one favor I have to ask of you?"

"Name it."

"Instead of Captain Rockwell, permit The Hercules to go," and The Gentleman from Texas smiled most sweetly as he glanced at the huge lieutenant, who quickly turned and faced him.

"You mean for me to let Lieutenant Hale accompany you in place of Captain Rockwell?"

"I do, sir."

"What do you say, Rockwell?"

"If Gold Spur prefers Hale, I certainly am content, sir."

"What say you, Hale?" and the colonel turned to The Hercules, who answered suspiciously:

"There is some treachery in this."

"Oh! if you are such a coward as to fear to go, I will not request the honor of your company," came in sneering tones from The Gentleman from Texas.

The bronzed face of the irate lieutenant flushed at the words, and he turned quickly toward the prisoner, saying savagely:

"I fear no man, sir, and you shall eat those words."

"I am wholly at your service now, sir, if Colonel Eldred will kindly permit—"

"No, no! I cannot allow this quarrel to go on."

"You can go or not, Hale, as you please, with the prisoner when the exchange is made, and if your hot head has run you into danger, you will have only yourself to thank for it, for, from the very first you have seemed antagonistic to Gold Spur, and, if I have wronged him in my suspicions, you are the cause."

"I will bear the brunt of it, sir, for I know that I have not wronged The Gentleman from Texas for I hope to prove him to be none other than the Jackal."

"And you will go to the place of exchange with me?" asked Gold Spur.

"I will."

"Thank you," and all noticed a peculiar light come into the handsome eyes of the Texan, a light that no one present seemed able to understand the meaning of.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

THE DUEL.

WHEN the sun was nearing the western horizon, a small party left the cavalry encampment in the timber, and moved slowly down the slope to the prairie bottom, which spread away on either side of a small stream, the banks of which were fringed with cottonwood trees, with here and there an ash, and hackberry.

In the edge of the timber congregated the troopers, gazing most anxiously upon the high hills that arose on the other side of the valley, and watching for the coming of the promised party from the retreat of the White Jackal.

Presently a murmur ran along the line as four persons were seen to emerge from the foothills.

They were not on foot, as were Buckskin Mose and his party, and two of them were at once recognized as the fair captives, and Colonel Eldred could hardly suppress the cheer that he saw the men wished to burst forth with.

"They are on the safe side, for they are mounted," remarked Major Gregory, while, as they came further down into the valley, Riley Rockwell, who was attentively regarding them through his field glass, said earnestly:

"One of the guards is a white man, Colonel Eldred."

"You are right, Rockwell, and he is attired in uniform."

"Colonel Eldred," and the young captain turned quickly to his commander.

"Well, captain?"

"Do you notice anything peculiar about that man?"

"He is a large man, and his face is beardless, while—"

"He wears a sergeant's uniform, sir."

"By heaven! it is the sergeant deserter, as I live," cried the colonel in stern tones.

"You are right, sir; the man is Maurice Sylvester, and he is in his uniform. I never would have believed this of Sylvester if I had not seen him with my own eyes," said Riley Rockwell, sadly.

"Buckskin Mose was right, then, when he said he saw him at the head of the red-skin band; but to think of the brazen impudence of the man to boldly ride out before us and show us how low he has fallen. Oh! that I could capture him," and the colonel paced to and fro, his brow flushed with indignation, while the comrades of the deserter sergeant seemed deeply pained at what they saw, and blushed for the shame of the man they had so much admired.

Watching the small party approaching the creek from the hills, they all saw them come to a halt in an open space, and the two men—the In-

dian and the white man—spring to the ground, while the ladies remained in their saddles.

Presently Buckskin Mose, The Hercules and the prisoner approached the others, and all excepting the scout and the red-skin exchanged salutations, while Lieutenant Hale said in his sneering way:

"I congratulate you, young ladies, upon your escape from such vile company."

"I believe we owe our escape to no effort of Lieutenant Hale," replied Esther Gerard, sharply, and the words brought a blush to the man's cheek, and the retort:

"No, you owe it to some idle whim of the Jackal; but you, sir, I am surprised to see take advantage of this meeting to boldly appear in view of your former comrades," and The Hercules turned to the sergeant, who replied calmly:

"I act as I please, sir, and for my crimes you are no more responsible than you are for the rescue of these two ladies."

"No insolence, sir, for I will not listen to it, but punish you as you deserve," angrily said the lieutenant.

"One word, sir," and The Gentleman from Texas turned to The Hercules.

"Well, sir."

"As another opportunity may never occur, permit me to say that no better time can ever be found than now for the settlement of the outstanding debt between us."

All looked at the speaker, and saw that his words had a deep meaning, while his eyes were fastened upon The Hercules in a way that officer did not at all like, and he said, quickly:

"I never quarrel, sir, with a man in irons."

"Are you the person in charge of these ladies, sir, until they are given in exchange for myself?" and Gold Spur turned to the sergeant, who answered quickly:

"I am."

"You are authorized to deliver them over to the scout here upon my being given up to you?"

"Yes, so the Jackal instructed me."

"Well, sir, kindly make the exchange, and then free my arms, for I ask nothing more, and lend me one of your pistols, and if that man is not a coward, he will meet me, face to face, for the insults he has continually heaped upon me."

"The chin-music are all sweetness, it are, pard Hercules, an' I doesn't see as yer kin refuse ther gentleman, seein' as things look a leetle dark for him, an' yer might not meet ag'in," put in Buckskin Mose, seemingly anxious for an affair between the Texan and The Hercules.

"I certainly shall offer no objection to the meeting, if the lieutenant is not afraid to meet you, Gold Spur," remarked the sergeant.

"Afraid! I fear no man," savagely said the lieutenant.

"Then, sir, ask the scout to serve as your second, and the sergeant will, I hope, act in a like capacity for me, while the ladies can ride on to their friends, who so anxiously await them, if so they wish," said Gold Spur.

"No, no, we will remain here; but oh, sir! do not risk your life in a duel with Lieutenant Hale," cried Edna, in alarm.

"Alas! Miss Eldred, affairs of this kind often occur on our border, and, as I now am given up to the mercy of the Jackal, I may not again have another opportunity to meet him; will you remove the iron from my right hand please, sergeant?"

"I hes ther key; here it are; so does yer say the word, sargint?"

The reply of the deserter was to stretch forth his hand and take the key, and then instantly release the right hand of the Texan from the iron cuff.

"Oh, scout, cannot you prevent this fearful meeting?" cried Edna, and Esther joined in the appeal to Buckskin Mose, who walked up to the horses of the maidens and answered in a low tone:

"Now, gals, don't yer say beans, an' we'll see some fun."

"But one of them may be killed," persisted Edna.

"Don't doubt it; but ef it's ther loot'nent he's no loss; ef it's Texas, then his death will be easier than ther one ther Jackal intends he shall die."

"What! would the renegade chief take his life?" asked Esther.

"I'm thinkin' that are jest what he w'u'd do, leetle gal."

"And does The Gentleman from Texas know this?"

"He are fully acquainted with the sarcumstance o' ther case."

"And yet he places himself in his power?"

"Ter git you putty gals out."

"I will not accept the sacrifice," said Edna Eldred, firmly.

"Nor I," rejoined Esther Gerard, in a tone equally as firm.

"Guess yer can't help it, leetle gals; but see, Ther Herk don't look adzactly happy at bein' fetched out fer a fight; yas, pard, I are ready," and unheeding the call of the maidens, Buckskin Mose sprang to the side of The Hercules, who called to him.

Ten paces had already been stepped off by the sergeant, and both Gold Spur and the lieutenant

ant had their revolvers in hand, and neither Edna or Esther dared now to speak, for the men had taken their positions, and were ready for the word.

It was a picturesque scene, yet a fearful one, with the two maidens seated a few steps apart on their horses, the Indian warrior, in full war-paint, holding his own and the animal ridden by the sergeant; the two men who were to confront death standing ten paces distant from each other, pistols in hand; the officer pale, sinister-looking, and his eyes and face brim full of hate, the Texan calm and with that strangely winning smile upon his handsome face that no danger or trouble could drive from it, and with his elegant Mexican costume setting off to advantage his superb form; the sergeant, a strange look upon his countenance, standing ready to give the word, and Buckskin Mose, supremely indifferent, apparently, not far from the lieutenant.

Seeing that all was ready, and noticing that both the troopers and the Indians, not understanding the delay, were growing uneasy, the sergeant gave the word, and the two weapons were quickly raised, and two shots broke the stillness of the scene, one following the other.

But The Gentleman from Texas had fired first, and his bullet went straight to its mark, and The Hercules, with a muttered curse, sunk in his tracks, while his adversary remained unhurt.

"Oh tell me, are we free?" cried Edna Eldred in a tone of anguish.

"You are, ladies, for I remain: farewell," said Gold Spur calmly, and he turned away, while Buckskin Mose said:

"Better skip fer ther timber, gals, an' tell ther kernul ter send a couple o' sojers fer ther dead loot'nent: better say four sojers, as he's a heavy one; don't linger, leetle wimmen, but skip."

Horrified at what they had witnessed, the maidens dashed away, for already was the prisoner and his two guards going toward the hills, and Buckskin Mose was left, looking quietly down upon the motionless form at his feet.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

THE GOLD SPUR IN BUSINESS.

IN the gathering gloom of twilight, Gold Spur, as, mounted upon the Indian's horse, he rode slowly toward the hills, saw the maidens dash toward the timber, and heard the wild cheer that greeted their safe arrival.

Then, still glancing back he beheld the Scout, Buckskin Mose, bending over the form of the lieutenant, and a moment after the soldiers that came and bore The Hercules away.

Behind him walked the Indian warrior, close upon the heels of his horse, and ahead, in stern silence rode the sergeant.

Up the steep hillside they went in the gathering gloom, until presently a guard was reached, of three warriors, and here, with a word to the Indians, the sergeant rode on.

Then, with a warrior behind and before his horse, Gold Spur continued up the steep ascent, to suddenly come to a halt, as the path ahead was filled with horsemen.

As they came nearer, at their head Gold Spur recognized the sergeant, and behind him came full three hundred braves, all well mounted and armed.

Like statues they rode by on their ponies, and were heading for the valley beyond, but not the one that divided them from the trooper camp.

As they passed many glanced in silence upon him, and one or two spoke a word to his warrior guards, as they stood upon either side of him; but this was all, and soon they passed from sight, and the braves moved on once more.

To the keen eye of The Gentleman from Texas were observable certain things that caused him to feel that a secret expedition of great importance was on hand, and that it was not an attack upon the trooper encampment by any means.

Instantly he began to plot a bold escape, and, his irons having been again fastened upon his wrists, he began to pull his hands through them, for the guards had not taken into consideration the extreme smallness of these members.

A little work and his hands were free, the Indian guard walking in front and behind his horse little dreaming of what the darkness was concealing from them.

Fastened to a fancy collar around the neck of the mustang he rode, was a tomahawk, and to grasp this was the work of an instant, and with it clutched firmly in his hand he bided his time.

It soon came, for the path led around the mountain side, by a narrow path upon a shelf of rock, with eighty feet sheer down to the canyon below.

It was a terrible risk, but Gold Spur took it, and bravely too, for, turning suddenly he dashed the tomahawk into the face of the warrior behind him, giving him a blow that sent him reeling over the precipice, his wild yell starting a thousand echoes from the rocks.

This death-cry had hardly given his comrade warning, when the mustang was upon him, and down beneath his hoofs the warrior went.

Checking the animal suddenly Gold Spur leaned far over, seized the red-skin in his powerful grasp and dragged him up to him, and the struggle was of but an instant's duration, before the second savage had lost his life.

To divest himself of the irons around his booted legs, and strip the Indian's body of its clothing, and throw it on himself, hurl the dead warrior over the precipice, back the pony to a spot wide enough on the shelf path to turn him around was the work of an instant almost.

Then Gold Spur mounted, and instead of continuing on up into the hills, where was the Indian village or camp, he took the trail leading back the way he had come.

Reaching where it branched off he followed the one he had seen the mounted warriors go, and was soon going at a canter directly after them.

After a ride of a mile he saw forms ahead, yet did not hesitate, seemingly knowing that it was one of the advance guards around the village.

He was right, for there were three Indians there, two of them lying down, the other standing up and leaning against a tree, smoking his tomahawk-pipe, and their ponies feeding not far away.

At his approach they all stood on the alert, and one of them called out in the Sioux tongue:

"Is it the Blue Buffalo?"

"No. It is the Comanche chief, Red Coyote," replied Gold Spur in the same language, knowing that the Jackal had a number of Comanche braves with him, one of whom had been his guard, and whom he had killed.

"The Comanche goes after the Jackal in his ride to the white man's fort?" queried the Sioux.

"Yes; the Red Coyote guarded the pale-face prisoner to the village, and the Jackal told him to follow on his trail."

"He will have to ride fast, for the warriors on the trail will go like the wind."

"The pony of the Red Coyote is good; he will run like a wolf," and so saying Gold Spur moved on, and had escaped from the cordon of guards that the Indians ever kept around their mountain retreat.

"Now, mustang, if you die under the run, you have got to carry me to my own gallant horse within the hour," he said, and down the hillside he urged the horse at a speed that was most reckless over the rough ground, and was killing to the animal.

But The Gentleman from Texas was bound on a mission that he was determined to accomplish, be the consequences what they might.

CHAPTER XXXV.

THE GARRISON SURPRISED BY A VISITOR.

ALL Indians are cruel masters, and when they drive their squaws to perform tasks they would shrink from as warriors, it may be certainly conceded that a brute under their power would not fare well.

Knowing that their lives, and perhaps with a view to their personal comfort too, depending upon their horses, they care for them well, yet ride them without mercy; but though the Indian brave who had owned the mustang which Gold Spur had captured, had doubtless been no exception to the rule, it is certain that he found his new master wholly unmerciful, for the lash was descending constantly upon him, and he was urged over rough trails, and up and down hills, at a speed that was killing him.

Though he knew the horse under him was rapidly failing him, The Gentleman from Texas did not abate his urging a jot or tittle, but kept him at his pace most mercilessly.

"On, on, brute, for it is but a mile more," cried Gold Spur, as the animal swayed badly with weakness.

"Come, the brute must die to save the human; it is the law of mankind," he again cried, as he urged the mustang up a steep hill, and then down into a ravine that seemed like a huge split, dividing the mountains.

On, on, he went, until at last there was before the tired animal a river, that brought a low neigh of delight from him.

"Here, old fellow you have done well; ha! it was too much for you, old horse," he cried, as the mustang staggered and fell from sheer exhaustion.

But without tarrying an instant he stripped from him the Indian bridle and trappings, and started to climb the hillside.

A rapid climb of a hundred yards, and he followed a path, which the mountain sheep hardly dare go, around the face of a bold, craggy precipice, that projected out into the river.

It was where the river had cut its way through a mountain, it seemed, for immediately across the stream there was another abrupt precipice, and the range ran on until lost in the distance.

In the face of the precipice upon which he stood, was a cavern-like cavity, over and around which the mountain pine and shrubs had grown in abundance, concealing it from view from the other shore.

But, in the darkness, as though thoroughly acquainted with the spot, Gold Spur entered, still carrying the traps he had taken from the Indian pony.

Half an hour after a horseman rode out of the cavern, and turning sharply to the left, began to descend the steep and dangerous path.

To accomplish this feat was no easy matter, but his rider left it wholly to the animal, and step by step he descended, until at last he reached the water's edge, and unhesitatingly entered the stream.

A short swim, and he landed where a buffalo trail crossed the river, and a few moments after, the animal was flying like the very wind across the rolling prairie, and the moon rising above the horizon, fell full upon the steed and rider, and revealed Featherhoof and The Gentleman from Texas.

Without urging the fleet animal kept on, until mile after mile had been left behind, and then with a far different feeling from that shown for the Indian pony, Gold Spur halted to rest and water his horse.

A short stop, and on once more flew the animal, and at last far in the distance, was visible a glimmering light, and Featherhoof gave a low whinny of delight.

"Yes, old fellow, there is rest, and you need it, for I have driven you hard; come, old boy, a few more miles, and we will be there, and if you have not gained four hours on those devils, I am surely no teller of time," and Gold Spur patted his horse with affection, and the splendid creature bounded forward with renewed speed.

At last, just as the gray of dawn was giving a sickly hue to the light of the moon, Featherhoof came to a sudden stop at the stern command of the sentinel at the garrison gate.

"Halt! Who comes there?"

"A friend!" replied Gold Spur, whom the sentinel could only indistinctly see.

"Advance, friend, and give the countersign!" was the order.

"I know no countersign; I come from the command of Colonel Eldred, with orders for Captain Moreland, and they are important," said The Gentleman from Texas almost impatiently.

There was a short parley at the gate, the sentinel called the sergeant of the guard, and he sought the officer on duty, and at last there came the command:

"Advance, sir, for Captain Moreland will see you."

Gold Spur instantly obeyed, and as he rode into the garrison, a dozen voices cried:

"The Gentleman from Texas!"

"Ay, seize him!" cried a lieutenant, who was the officer on duty.

"Back! I came not here to be seized and put in irons, but to see Captain Moreland, so lead me to him, or there will be weeping and wailing follow."

The stern, strange words of Gold Spur checked the advance upon him, and, dismounting, he walked quietly toward the quarters of Captain Moreland, who met him at the door.

"Well, sir, you have come to surrender yourself, I suppose?" said the captain.

"I have come, sir, to warn you of a fearful danger threatening this garrison; but first, kindly have some one look after my horse, for I have ridden him seventy odd miles between darkness and light; then, sir, I will tell you why I have come."

Impressed by the manner of the strange man, Captain Moreland called to his own servant to look after Featherhoof, and invited The Gentleman from Texas into his quarters, the soldiers standing in groups around, and wondering what new adventure the Texan had on the tapis for them, and greatly surprised that he had again entered the garrison, so soon after his daring escape from it.

"Well, sir, be seated, and tell me why you have run your head into a noose, by again coming into this garrison?" said Captain Moreland, as he motioned Gold Spur to a chair.

"I was not born to be hanged, my dear captain, so threats disturb me not; but I came here, sir, to warn you of a great danger."

"What! has aught befallen Colonel Eldred, or are you currying favor by some cock and bull story?"

"I curry favor with no man, Captain Moreland, and I act now from no desire to win praise."

"When I left here, as you may remember—"

"Yes, I remember it distinctly," dryly said the officer, and then he added:

"I'll give you a thousand dollars for that horse you ride."

"No, he is not for sale, and money will not buy him, sir; but the question on hand:

"I am listening."

"I went to the camp of Colonel Eldred, for he had bivouacked near where the Indian band had halted—"

"Under the Jackal?"

"Yes, under the Jackal, who so cleverly deceived Buckskin Mose, that he moved on to his retreat, leaving the soldiers still in camp, and the next morning had so skillfully covered his trail, that he left no trace by which to follow him."

"In this predicament Colonel Eldred was aided by an old man known as The Hermit of the Republican."

"I have heard of him, a most remarkable character."

"So he is said to be, sir; well, he put the colonel on the right trail, in fact led the troopers to the vicinity of the Jackal's retreat, and then mysteriously disappeared, and I, knowing that it would be madness to attack the renegade in his stronghold, offered myself in exchange for Miss Eldred and Miss Gerard."

"Of course the offer proved that you thought yourself of more value than the Jackal considered you?" said Captain Moreland with a sneer.

"You are wrong, sir; the Jackal accepted me as an exchange for the two ladies, and they were delivered in safety to the colonel."

"Do you tell the truth, sir?"

Gold Spur's face flashed with anger, but he replied calmly:

"I did not come here to lie to you, and I beg that you will not take advantage of my being alone and friendless in the fort, to again insult me."

"I beg pardon," frankly said the captain, impressed with the dignity of the man and his utter fearlessness.

"It is granted, sir. Yes, I do tell the truth, Captain Moreland, and I tell you that the ladies were given over to the colonel's charge and I was carried to the retreat of the Indians."

"And when was this?"

"Last evening at sunset."

"And yet you are here now."

"I am, sir, and, as I said, to warn you of danger which I suspected from one pledge the colonel had to make with the exchange."

"And that was?"

"Not to attack the Jackal in his retreat."

"And the colonel agreed to this?"

"By all means, for it would have been madness for him not to have done so, even with treble his present force, as he has no idea how large a village lies up in the hills; but this pledge excited my suspicion, and I had not reached the Indian camp, whither I was being taken under the charge of two braves, when I discovered the cause of the demand."

"And what was it?"

"That the Jackal, knowing that Colonel Eldred would keep his pledged word, could take nearly his whole force in warriors on the war-path."

"And attack the troopers in their camp?"

"No, Captain Moreland, for they would have been beaten off, and gotten only hard knocks and no booty, if successful even. Their destination was elsewhere."

"Where, for instance, Mr. Texas?"

"THIS GARRISON!" was the startling response of Gold Spur.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

GOLD SPUR TELLS A STARTLING STORY.

FOR an instant Captain Moreland was startled by the sudden announcement of The Gentleman from Texas, as to the point of attack at which the White Jackal was aiming; but after an instant he cast off all anxiety, and said, contemptuously:

"Bah! Sir Gold Spur, I have in this garrison three hundred men, and—"

"About two hundred of which," interrupted Gold Spur, "are fighting men, with a large number of the balance teamsters, servants and hangers-on generally, who cannot be readily brought into action."

"They have to take care of a hundred or more women and children and defend a vast amount of valuable stores."

"You seem well informed, sir, regarding this garrison."

"I am, sir. I know, also, that there are two settlements within a dozen miles of here which can turn out half a hundred more men; but I also know that, unsuspecting danger, these settlements can be overrun and devastated in an hour."

"And the Jackal, you say, is to do this, and with the force at his command?"

"I do, sir."

"Why, he cannot number over two hundred men, for he had his whole force in the attack on the Gerard wagon train some time since."

"He had his immediate force of renegade Sioux, Cheyennes and Comanches, sir, but, feeling his power, Two Lance, Bad Medicine and Old Whistler are his allies, and their villages are all in the hills I have just left."

"And they are with the White Jackal in this raid you say he is coming upon?" asked Captain Moreland, for the first time since the interview showing anxiety.

"I do, sir; besides his own band those chiefs will be under the command of the Jackal."

"And you are said to be the very man of whom you speak," said Captain Moreland, bluntly.

"True, sir, I am said to be all that is bad; but will you heed my warning?"

"Why, I will heed it, yes; for, be you what you may, I would be foolish not to do so; but Colonel Eldred and his men will doubtless arrive to-day, and—"

"You are mistaken, sir; Colonel Eldred, I feel confident, did not break camp until this

morning, and if he presses clear through he cannot be here before midnight."

"And yet you have come from there, you say, since dark last night?"

"I am not a regiment, Captain Moreland, for great bodies move slowly; and besides, I have a horse which has not his equal from the Missouri to the Rio Grande."

"I will side with you there; but without the arrival of the colonel, I can hold this garrison against a thousand warriors, ay, against far more."

"I do not doubt it, sir, being forewarned; but I have not told you that the White Jackal has a bold game to play on you."

"What is it?"

"His band, that passed me last night, were all dressed in uniform."

"What! Indians in uniform?" cried the captain, with intense surprise.

"Yes, sir; steadily has the Jackal collected uniforms and military saddles and bridles, and the red-skins were clothed as soldiers last night, and their horses were saddled and bridled with military equipments."

"Well, this is good indeed. I expect he will next offer his red regiment to the general to hunt down the savages," laughed the captain.

"Had I not warned you, he would have garrisoned this fort with his red regiment," was the significant reply.

"I tell you, I defy him and all his allies to take this garrison."

"By force, yes, but by strategy he intends to make the attempt, for, Captain Moreland, his braves are all picked, their horses are also selected, and, dressed in uniform, with faces whitened with paint, they would have ridden unchallenged into this fort."

"Great God! do you mean that this was the Jackal's strategy?" cried Captain Moreland, turning pale.

"I do, sir; they knew the colonel would not break camp until this morning, and perhaps make a two days' march back here; in the mean time, believed to be a cavalry regiment from some fort, perhaps the colonel's command returning, they would have ridden unchallenged into this fort, and then you know the scene that would have followed, while the bands under Two Lance and the other chiefs would have swept down upon the settlements, and the remainder of your regiment coming back would have ridden into the trap, little dreaming of the change that had taken place."

"Now, sir, you can see, divining their intention by their disguise, and finding out where they were going from the Indian outpost, I rode so hard to warn you."

"This is marvelous, sir, and almost passes belief in its devilish plot and cunning."

"It is a bold game, sir, for the Jackal to play; but then you know he is a bold man."

"Yes; but you said you were his prisoner," and the captain looked with suspicion once more aroused at the Texan.

"So I was, sir; but discovering the plot, I made my escape."

"It is strange that you could escape from the Jackal."

"I did the same, sir, from this garrison," was the retort.

"True; you are a remarkable man, Sir Gentleman from Texas."

"Thank you, sir; I hope you will at least prove yourself a man of sufficient good sense to heed my warning."

"I shall do so; and more, my Texas friend, I shall be that sensible, as to hold you prisoner until the truth of all you said is proven."

"Do so, sir; but first send scouts to put the settlements on their guard, and—"

"Why do you pause?"

"I was thinking that I would like to go and warn colonel Eldred, and have him come up in the rear of the Jackal's band and attack them, or lay in ambush for them on their retreat."

"Ah! I will send a trusty scout to so inform the colonel, but you must remain a prisoner; by Jove now I think of it, there is not a man in the garrison I dare send."

"I will go, sir."

"You are too anxious, and besides, your company is so charming, I prefer to keep you here; let me see! Mustang Kit has gone to Fort Wallace with dispatches; Buffalo Bill is still in bed with his wounded leg; Texas Jack is down on that trail in the Indian Territory; Buckskin Mose and Rifle Ralph are with Colonel Eldred, and not a man is fit to go and find the command."

"It is a pity, sir; had I had time I would have warned Colonel Eldred, but I knew it was a long run for Featherweight, as I had to make a detour to avoid the Jackal."

"Gold Spur, I wish to Heaven I could trust you, and say here is my man; but I cannot, for you took that deserter, Sergeant Sylvester, out from under our very eyes, and suspicion points so strongly to your being other than you represent yourself, that I dare not put full faith in you."

"I wish to believe you, and the truth is I am afraid to."

Gold Spur laughed right out at the doubt of Captain Moreland, and said:

"As you please, sir; only do not refuse to heed my warning."

"That I will do; now I must send you back to your old quarters, and if I do wrong, forgive me."

"Oh it matters not, sir; but, by the way, Captain Moreland, the Jackal is not a man to spare horseflesh, and not expecting a retreat, and with the idea that he is to capture a bonanza in fine animals, he will not tarry, and must arrive within a couple of hours, so I advise you to be prepared for him."

"I will, if he comes," and calling an orderly he told him to send a sergeant and file of soldiers to conduct The Gentleman from Texas back to his old quarters in the guard-house.

Ten minutes after Gold Spur was pacing to and fro in the very room from which he had aided the escape of Sergeant Sylvester, and which afterward had been his own prison.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

A MYSTERIOUS DISAPPEARANCE.

THAT Captain Moreland, whatever his doubt of The Gentleman from Texas might be, was too cautious and good an officer to leave his warning unheeded, was at once proven, for he called to his quarters a council of all the commissioned officers in the garrison.

To these he quickly made known all that the Texan had told him.

Of course there were some skeptics among the lot, and a few thought that Gold Spur had returned from some deep motive of his own, and took this means to gain his point by a startling narrative, and one croaker went so far as to say he believed that Colonel Eldred and his command had all been massacred by the White Jackal, who was really none other than The Gentleman from Texas himself.

Unheeding these suggestions, Captain Moreland plainly stated that he believed Gold Spur, although he had placed him in the guard-house, and ordered every officer to go at once and prepare for action, giving them instructions to have their men on duty, with plenty of ammunition, and that no show of force, or fight was to be made until he gave the order.

To the surprise of the women and children, they were ordered to keep near their quarters, and to confine themselves to them, should there be any firing.

Though the officers, in spite of many of them believing the story a great hoax, went right to work in earnest to get all in readiness, hardly had Captain Moreland dispatched a lieutenant and four men to warn the settlements on the river, before the look-out on duty reported a body of men in sight.

Instantly all was excitement, and hundreds of eyes peered out over the prairie, to where was visible, a long distance off, what appeared to be a cavalry battalion.

They were heading toward the fort, that was certain, and were in uniform.

Concealing his soldiers behind the stockades and breastworks, Captain Moreland, and a couple of brother officers, took up a position where they could command a view of the prairie and the approaching horsemen.

"It is the colonel's command returning," said one officer.

"I believe after all you are right," slowly said Captain Moreland, with his field glass to his eye.

A laugh followed the remark, and as the horsemen drew nearer other comments were made, not at all flattering to the truthfulness of The Gentleman from Texas.

"You've been gulled, captain," said Lieutenant Burr.

"Yes, Moreland, it will take your whole months' pay for drinks, to get let off for this," remarked the quartermaster.

"I am content, for I am not fond of a fight, if I can avoid it," laughed Captain Moreland, and then he added, with his glass still to his eye.

"Yes, I think I see Colonel Eldred now."

"And that large fellow is certainly the Hercules; it certainly is the command returning! Ah, Moreland, what will not the settlement do to poor Somers for gulling them?"

In silence Captain Moreland still kept his gaze upon the coming troop, until at last he cried:

"Yes, I recognize the colonel, now, and upon each side of him is a lady on horseback; orderly, go with two men to the guard-house, and bring the prisoner here," and the captain turned to a soldier who stood near.

"Is you afther m'anin' The Gentleman from Texas, sur?" asked the orderly.

"Yes."

The orderly bowed and disappeared, and Lieutenant Burr asked, with a laugh:

"Are you going to ornament the bar over the stockade gate with Gold Spur, captain, for telling you such a lie?"

"I have half a mind to; but I wish to ask him how Colonel Eldred, who he said was seventy miles away at dawn this morning, has gotten here in three hours; what is it, sergeant?" and the captain looked down from his position upon the stockade tower, to a soldier who had called out to him.

"The young lady, sir, the Child of the Regi-

ment, says she wishes to drive over to the settlement with Mrs. Benson, now there is no danger."

"All right, let them pass; but I think the fair Sibyl might remain awhile to welcome back Miss Edna and Miss Gerard from their captivity," called out the captain, addressing Sibyl, who was leaning out of a covered buggy, and looking up at the officers.

"Oh, I'll be back soon, captain, good-by," and the lively girl spoke to the two horses hitched to the buggy, and whirled out of the gate at a rattling pace, driving with a skill that brought the remark from one of the officers:

"The fair Sibyl drives as she rides."

"She holds the ribbons well, and has gotten two dashing animals there; but what possessed her to ride in that old hearse of a buggy, when she could go on horseback?"

"I cannot answer you, Burr, other than to say that the ways of women are more mysterious than Providence; now, her not remaining only half an hour longer to welcome Edna and Miss Gerard, is as unaccountable as her hitching that wild horse of her deserter father, and that other animal, in that crazy old vehicle; what is it, orderly?" and Captain Moreland turned to the soldier who had just returned, and whose face showed that he had something to communicate of importance.

"The prisoner has escaped, sur!"

"Escaped! The Man from Texas?"

"That same, sur; he's afther being gone away, intirely."

"This cannot be, for I sent him to the guard-house, and had a sentinel placed at the door."

"Faith, thet same didn't howld him in, sur, fer it's out he is."

"Burr, go and see to this, and have the sentinel that was on duty at once put in irons; and also spread the alarm for the recapture of the prisoner, for he is certainly in the garrison."

"Captain Moreland, one minute! now turn your glass upon those fellows," said the quartermaster, in suppressed tones.

Instantly Captain Moreland did so, and then came the words, vehemently spoken:

"By Heaven! after all, the Texan was right."

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

THE MYSTERY EXPLAINED.

WHEN Gold Spur departed from the quarters of Captain Moreland, under the charge of a sergeant and two soldiers, he was led across the garrison plaza to the guard-house, which he already had had an intimate acquaintance with.

Walking with a bold step and certain reckless air that seemed natural to him, and being well known to all in the fort, he attracted considerable attention, for his late exploits were fresh in the memory of all, and they looked upon him as really the White Jackal in disguise, so thoroughly had the suspicion against him, set afloat by The Hercules, gained ground.

Seated in the window of her pleasant room, engaged in some fancy work, was one whose keen eyes caught sight of him, and instantly her beautiful face flushed, and then grew pale, when she saw that he was a prisoner.

That one was Sibyl, the Child of the Regiment, and rising, she attracted the attention of Gold Spur, who raised his hat politely, and passed on.

But hardly had he been incarcerated in the guard-house, and the sentinel stationed at the door, when Sibyl appeared and asked to see him.

"Gainst orders, miss," said the guard.

"Is no one allowed to see him, Danforth?"

"No, miss."

"But I wish to ask him about my poor father, Danforth."

"Miss Sibyl, I would do more for you than anybody I know, for I hasn't forgot the kindness you showed me t'other day when I was sick; but the captain's orders are to let no one into the guard-house."

"But I don't wish to go in, Danforth; only to speak to the prisoner."

The soldier hesitated and said slowly:

"Guess that won't be breaking orders, Miss Sibyl, so I'll jist open the door a leetle crack, for yer to look in," and he took the large key from his belt, placed it in the lock, and opened the door just a little.

"Now, Danforth, stand behind me there, to see that I don't go in," said the young girl, and, as Gold Spur approached the door, she continued:

"Back again I see?"

"Yes; I came on business that I find detains me longer than I hoped for," he rejoined with a smile.

"Indeed! may I ask what it was?"

In a few hasty words he told her why he had come, and the result, and she seemed deeply impressed.

"It is unkind in Captain Moreland to thus hold you prisoner," she said, with indignation.

"Oh, no, for he is doing his duty as he sees it; I only fret because I cannot return and warn Colonel Eldred, so as to make the victory complete; as it is, the whole command may be surprised and annihilated, as I am confident none of them suspect the danger afoot."

"And could I not go and warn them?" asked the fearless girl.

"You?"

"Yes. Why not?"

"My dear girl, they are far from here, and the trail is a hard one and full of dangers."

"I am a thorough prairie girl, and if you would draw me a map of the trails they are likely to take, and where I might expect to find them, I will undertake it."

"I know your fearless nature, Sibyl, and your skill in prairie craft; but I would never allow you to run such a risk."

"Then you must go."

"Alas! you see where I am."

Impulsively she replied:

"Ah! you shall go free."

"How can I?"

"I don't know, but you shall."

"I fear not, for I shall be doubly watched until it is too late to head the colonel off."

"Let me think about all this," and she bowed her head a moment in thought, and then said slowly:

"I have a plot that will do, I hope."

"Well?"

"Your horse is here?"

"Yes, the servant of Captain Moreland gave him a stall in Colonel Eldred's stable."

"I will be back in a moment," and she half turned away, but remembering she had not spoken upon the subject she had told the sentinel she had come for, she asked so that the latter could hear:

"So my father is well?"

"Yes."

"Where was he?"

"In the camp."

"What camp?"

"The Jackal's."

"Ah! he is taking some fearful risk to clear up this charge against him; now I must be off, but I will soon be back," and locking the door herself she handed the large key to the sentinel, at the same time remarking:

"Thank you, Danforth, for your kindness; but I am coming back, to bring the prisoner a comfortable pillow, and some little things."

"No pistols and knives in the bundle, I hope miss."

"You can see for yourself, Danforth, when I bring it," she said in an injured tone.

"No, no, miss, I'd take your word against a thousand other girls."

With a laugh The Child of the Regiment bounded away, and returned to her room at head-quarters.

But in half an hour she was back again, carrying in her arms what appeared to be a pillow in snow-white case, and a small basket.

The sentinel unlocked the door for her, and again she stood in the doorway, and handed the pillow and basket in, at the same time slipping him a letter.

Motioning for him to read it, she stood talking in a random way, while he read what she had written, and which was as follows:

"I have determined to make a bold effort to get you out, so have harnessed your horse and mine to a top-buggy belonging to the chaplain."

"The pillow-case contains a dress, bonnet, veil and shawl, which put on at once, and stand by the door."

"Your weapons lie on the table outside, where the sergeant left them."

"I shall drive down in this direction, pretend that I cannot manage the horses, and run them around the corner of the cabin, and call to Danforth to aid me."

"Then you come out, for I shall not lock the door, but pretend to, and hand the key to the sentinel, and you can, in your disguise walk toward the Band quarters, where I will take you in the vehicle, and drive you out of the garrison."

"Your saddle, and mine, are already in the buggy, and once out of the fort, I know what Featherfoot can do, and if you find and warn Colonel Eldred, it will get us both a pardon."

"To a man of your nerve I need offer no advice."

"SIBYL."

"It is a daring act, but a feasible one," he said in a low tone, and aloud he thanked her for her kindness, and Sibyl turned away, skillfully leaving the door unlocked, though she pretended to bolt it.

Handing the key to the sentinel she engaged him in conversation with the remark:

"You are one of the best fathers I have, Danforth, and I'll not forget your kindness."

"I want to please you, miss, and I haven't really disobeyed orders in doing so."

"Oh no, for I did not go into the guard-house."

"I'll swear to that, and I don't wonder you like the Texan, for he's a game one and as handsome as a picture; I tell you, miss, I don't believe all the stories about him, for if he is as bad as they say he's got the wrong face on him."

"So I think, Danforth; by the way, I am going to drive over to the settlement; is there anything you want there?"

"Well now, I would like a package of smoking tobacco from the store at the cross-roads, for that I gets from the sutler I believe is coarse sawdust, soaked in tobacco juice; I tell you, Miss Sibyl, we have to watch these army sutlers, for they come here determined to get rich off of

the poor soldiers and bordermen in a year's time."

"I have heard they are a little crooked in their dealings, Danforth; but I will get you the tobacco," and Sibyl walked away, to appear in a few moments seated in the chaplain's covered buggy, and with a pair of horses that closely resembled the red bay she had ridden on her chase after Gold Spur, and the horse of that individual himself.

She was driving rapidly, and it seemed awkwardly, and approaching the guard-house, guided the horses up to it on the side around the corner from the door, at the same time calling pleadingly to Danforth the sentinel to come to her aid.

Instantly he obeyed, and seized the horses by the bits, bringing them to a halt.

"I guess these reins are not right, Danforth; please fix them for me," she said calmly.

The soldier did find the reins of uneven length, and readily arranged them, at the same time saying:

"These brutes seem wild as bucks, miss, and you are surely not going alone!"

"Oh no, I shall have company, for Mrs. Benson goes with me," and catching sight of the flutter of a dress at the Band quarters Sibyl sprung into the buggy and drove away, this time handling the reins with consummate skill.

Watching her, Danforth saw her halt and take a companion into the buggy, little dreaming that the dress and bonnet, instead of hiding the large and stately form of Mrs. Benson, concealed from curious eyes The Gentleman from Texas.

Delighted with the success of her plot thus far, Sibyl boldly drove to the gate, passed through it safely, and went along at a pace over the settlement trail, that would have been anything but agreeable to the widow Benson.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

THE BITTERS BITTEN.

THE cause of Captain Moreland's sudden remark—"By Heaven! after all the Texan was right!"—which he gave expression to upon suddenly discovering something which the quartermaster had pointed out, was on account of observing the general appearance of the coming horsemen.

Up to that minute all were cracking jokes at the strange story concocted by The Gentleman from Texas, to suit some motive of his own, to them incomprehensible; but now, as Captain Moreland looked again through his glass, there were some things that struck him as most peculiar.

In the first place, the faces of the supposed troopers were as white as if the whole command were just returning from a siege in the hospital.

Again, there was not a red-bearded man visible, but all with coarse whiskers, those who wore beard, as black as night.

Nor did they ride just like the dashing dragoons, and though the whole party would pass muster if not critically examined, and with no suspicion cast upon them, under the lens of doubt and scrutiny, the captain saw that The Gentleman from Texas was certainly right.

Instantly he sent Lieutenant Burr, and other officers acting as aides on his staff, to the different captains, telling them to be on their guard, and of the discovery he had made.

In the mean time the horsemen drew nearer and nearer, and the two who were supposed to be Edna and Esther, had fallen back a little with the personage who rode between them, and who really was not a bad make-up of Colonel Eldred himself.

Another look at the coming cavalcade, and then Captain Moreland glanced along the trail leading to the settlement, to see that the vehicle lately passed through the gate, was going at a rapid pace.

"By Jupiter! I believe that those horses are running away with the Child of the Regiment, Burr."

"If they are, sir, she is not in the danger she would have been here, had those fellows gained an entrance unsuspected," answered the lieutenant.

"You are right there, Burr, and assuredly would they have come in unsuspected had it not been for the warning of that curious Texan," warmly remarked Captain Moreland.

"The Gold Spur certainly deserves his freedom now, captain," said one.

"He has taken it without permission it seems; for me, you say, Caruthers?" and Captain Moreland held forth his hand for a letter a corporal brought to him.

"Yes, sir. The Child of the Regiment asked me to bring it to you when I got off duty."

The captain took the envelope, opened it, and a cry burst from his lips as he read it.

Instantly all turned upon him to inquire the cause, and he said in a hoarse voice:

"Listen to this please, gentlemen."

Then he read aloud as follows:

"MY DEAR CAPTAIN MORELAND:—If a woman is always getting a man into trouble, as I heard you say a short while since, one has now reversed the saying, and gotten a man out of trouble."

"To be plain with you, fully believing the word of The Gentleman from Texas, and anxious that he should go and warn Colonel Eldred of the danger threatening him, without orders, I released him, and by what you will have to admit was a clever trick."

"The guard, Danforth, is no more to blame than you are, for, as I am called the Good Samaritaness, and relieve the sick and needy, I sought the prisoner, with certain articles to cheer him; said articles being a dress, bonnet and shawl, and though the sentinel did not admit me, he could not refuse my handing my bundle which appeared to be a cot pillow, in, and a note to the Gold Spur told him my plot."

"That plan was for me to dash up to one side of the guard-house with my team, which was supposed to be unmanageable and call lustily to poor Danforth for aid, and when he ran to me, the prisoner was to let himself out and escape to the Band quarters, where, as the Widow Benson, I was to pick him up in my vehicle."

"If you get this note, you will see that my plot was a success, and if you send over to the guard-house you will find poor Danforth on duty over a cage from which he little dreams the bird has flown."

"For my act I seek no excuse, other than that my heart prompts it, for The Gentleman from Texas, you remember, saved the life of my most unfortunate father."

"And for my act, I will return and suffer such punishment as you deem I deserve."

"With respect,"

"SIBYL,"

"Child of the Regiment."

"Well, that was the cleverest of clever acts," cried Lieutenant Burr with real enthusiasm.

"She is a little vixen, and I cannot understand her," remarked Captain Moreland.

"Being a woman who could!" growled an old bachelor cynic.

But ere more could be said the captain saw that it was time for action, and once more giving the coming horsemen a sweeping glance, and seeing that they were not what they professed to be, but the Indians painted, uniformed, and generally disguised as soldiers, he called to his bugler to blow:

"Commence firing!"

Instantly along the line a flash of flame shot forth, and the roar of rifles and guns was deafening.

And into that living mass of men and brutes, tore the cruel hail of lead and iron, and then followed the agonizing shrieks of wounded horses, the wild war-whoops of Indian braves, stern orders, and groans of anguish.

"Fire!" shouted the officers along the line, and once more the fearful discharge was heard, and down upon the prairie went horses and riders.

In vain then was it that the White Jackal charged forward, striving to get his red followers to break in the garrison gates; they were surprised where they had expected to surprise, terror-stricken when they had expected to strike terror, and cut down and killed, where they had expected to kill and scalp, and in wild dismay they turned and fled from the fearful scene, leaving behind them scores of their comrades, and wounded, struggling ponies, unable to fly from the field.

And, as they fled far out upon the prairie, suddenly out of the cottonwood grove, filed a large band of warriors, in all the glory of their war-paint, and joined the defeated masqueraders.

And there they halted, and all in the fort could see that some council for devilry and revenge was going on.

"Yes, those are Sioux and Cheyennes, and they were ready to charge into the garrison, as soon as the Jackal and his red devils in uniform had gotten in and begun the fight."

"Well, again I say, gentlemen, that The Gentleman from Texas was right, and to him we owe our lives this moment."

"We do, indeed, Captain Moreland, and the man who says aught against Gold Spur after this, quarrels with me," remarked an old veteran officer, and all present indorsed his words, and universal regret was expressed that he was not there to hear their apologies for the past doubt of him which all in the garrison, with very few exceptions, had shown.

CHAPTER XL.

THE REGIMENT BEMOANS A SAD LOSS.

AFTER the consultation of the allied bands of Indians, far out upon the prairie, and in full view of the fort, the entire force began to move slowly back, as if to attack the garrison.

It was evident that their calculations had all gone awry, for they seemed really dazed by the blow they had received.

Counting with perfect confidence upon the daring plot of their white leader, The Jackal, whose cunning they knew to match their own, and whose skill they readily admitted was superior, they took an hour's consultation to recover from the shock sufficiently to decide upon some course.

Had the garrison fallen, all would have been lovely for them, as they would have kept in it sufficient force to entrap the command of Colonel Eldred upon his return, and then throw the bands of Two Lance and Bad Medicine upon the settlement of ranches some miles away.

But the failure of their attack on the fort, through the discovery of their being *en masque*, and the severe punishment they received in

the loss of men and ponies, caused them to decide upon another course, for if they swept down upon the Gerard settlement, with the garrison in their rear, they knew a large force of cavalry, well mounted and splendidly armed, would be hurled upon them, and still force enough remain to hold the garrison.

To gain time The Jackal advised that a feint should be made, as if to attack the garrison, and, if there was a possibility of success, to really do so after nightfall.

Another force, under old Whistler, was to be sent back to lie in ambush for Colonel Eldred on his return, and thereby give the savages some chance of revenge.

Having settled upon this plan, the larger force of nearly one thousand warriors, mounted upon their ponies, began to form in a semi-circle, and move slowly toward the garrison, intending to rest a wing on the river bank, each side of the fort.

The remainder, and comprising several hundred warriors on the freshest horses, were sent back to intercept the returning troopers.

All these movements were eagerly watched from the fort, and to give the advancing line a hint not to crowd them, Captain Moreland sent several shells from a twelve-pound howitzer into their midst.

These shots, at such long range, made them wary in their approach, and correspondingly delighted the defenders of the garrison.

Presently a cry burst from a hundred throats, and every eye was turned across the prairie to discover the cause that had so excited those who beheld it.

At first it was believed to be the returning troopers, and joy filled every breast; then it was thought the long guns had caused the redskins to start in rapid retreat.

But no, neither of these had caused that loud cry.

And out on the prairie was visible the cause. A horse was flying like a whirlwind toward the garrison gate.

And upon that horse was not a man but a woman.

And then all recognized horse and rider, and another wild cheer burst from every throat.

It was Sibyl the Child of the Regiment, mounted upon the large blood-bay she had driven out, hitched to the chaplain's buggy with Featherhoof.

The redskins saw her purpose, and started to intercept her, and having a less distance to ride, the thing looked possible.

But the right arm of Sibyl was seen to rise and fall rapidly, and it was evident that the keen lash was driving the bay to do his utmost.

And the redskins also urged their horses forward at a tremendous pace, and another five minutes must tell the story.

"Turn those guns upon the devils, but for God's sake don't hit the girl," cried Captain Moreland, and the two howitzers that could be brought to bear on the redskins, opened with angry roar.

Cheered by the thought of help, Sibyl seemed to urge her horse on more rapidly, and hope arose in the hearts of all in the garrison, for they thought the Indians would be driven back at the firing.

But no, there were noted chiefs in that band of horsemen, and they faced death recklessly, and urged their ponies with their knives to greater haste, cutting gashes in their backs.

Now and then a savage went down under a shot, but his comrades held on, and matters were looking dubious for the Child of the Regiment, when Lieutenant Burr cried out:

"Captain Moreland, may I call for volunteers to go to her aid?"

"You can, my boy," was the cheery reply.

"Half a hundred fathers here to save their beautiful child!" shouted the young officer, and twice that number sprung to obey.

But, contenting himself with two score gallant troopers, the lieutenant mounted in hot haste, the gates were thrown open, and out they dashed amid a ringing cheer from their comrades.

Sibyl saw this movement for her rescue, and waved her handkerchief; but there was one other who saw it, too, and he dashed suddenly ahead of the hundred of Indians in the mad race, and dropped the ponies behind him with a speed that proved he was mounted upon no ordinary horse.

And quickly, too, he gained upon the blood bay of Sibyl, and it seemed evident that he would head her off, if none of the others could.

And upon this man the cannon poured their shell, for he was seen to be in uniform, and his face was white.

And more, that face was known to all, for, devoid though of the beard he was wont to wear, they recognized, with a groan of derision, Maurice Sylvester, the deserter sergeant.

And upon this man the eye of Sibyl also fell, and then her course was changed, for, from running directly toward the gallant troopers coming to her rescue, she dashed right for the solitary horseman, and her thrilling cry reached the ears of Lieutenant Burr and his party.

"Father! father! you will save me, will you not?"

A moment after she was by his side, and then, inwardly, if not audibly cursing his luck at not having saved her, the young lieutenant gave orders to his men to "right about," and started back for the fort, while Sibyl was lost to sight among the warrior-horsemen that surrounded her and her father.

"Oh, curse that sergeant! he is indeed a renegade, and he has now taken his daughter with him," groaned the young lieutenant, as he joined his brother officers, and bitter indeed were the anathemas that arose on all sides against Maurice Sylvester, the deserter sergeant.

CHAPTER XLII.

AN UNEXPECTED APPARITION.

I WILL now return to The Gentleman from Texas and Sibyl, after their departure in the chaplain's rather antiquated buggy.

Unused as were both the horses to being in harness, they still behaved with remarkable kindness, until the rapid jolting of the crazy vehicle caused it to rattle forth an accompaniment to the hoof-falls of the animals as they sped along in a rapid gallop, instead of a dignified trot.

This intense rattling, growing each moment more pronounced and disagreeable, at last caused the impatient and nervous bay to send his heels back against the dashboard with a blow that made the splinters fly, and by no means improved the appearance of the vehicle.

The ringing laugh of the really reckless young heroine, caused the bay to repeat the performance, and in a short while the buggy was in a condition to make the chaplain mentally swear, howsoever close together he might keep his lips.

"Well, Miss Sibyl, we cannot keep on at this rate or the bay will kick us back to the fort, so let us take to the saddles which you so thoughtfully put under the seat," said The Gentleman from Texas, as he brought the horses to a sudden halt, the shock of which made almost a wreck of the vehicle.

Hastily he saddled the two horses, and placed Sibyl upon her horse as easily as he would lift a child.

"Now, sir, I must leave you," she said.

"Leave me?"

"Yes."

"Why, I thought—"

"Now don't say that you thought I was going on with you to join the colonel, for I had no such idea."

"I was in hopes you had," he said, in a disappointed tone.

"No."

"Miss Eldred and Miss Gerard are there."

"True, but they are not *here*; no, I go back to the fort."

"It is three miles away."

"I do not care, I shall go."

"You run a great risk."

"I do not care for that; I came out with you to aid in your escape, and now I have had my ride; but do throw off that dress and bonnet, for I do not wish to remember you as the Widow Benson."

He blushed and hastily disrobed himself of the dress the easiest way: *à la est*, by running his knife from the neck down.

"Now you have spoiled the widow's dress."

"She shall have a silk one in place of it."

"That bonnet is not becoming."

"Ah! I had forgotten it," and the widow would have gone mad to see the way her bonnet was disposed of with a kick.

"Now, good-by."

"You will not go with me?"

"No," she said, firmly.

"Then allow me to thank you for what you have done for me."

"It is no more than I should have done; good-by, and if you see my father tell him I long to have him come back and remove the shadow upon him."

The face of Gold Spur darkened at her words, but he said, quickly:

"I will tell him; good-by."

She held forth her hand and he grasped it warmly, and said:

"Ride hard, head for the main gate near the river, and may you arrive in safety."

Wheeling suddenly he bounded into his saddle, and the next instant the two were flying over the prairie in different directions.

But not far had either gone when the firing from the fort came to their ears, and The Gentleman from Texas drew rein and called loudly to the maiden to halt.

But she unheeded his call and rode on.

To overtake her he knew would be impossible, so, with a sigh, he once more rode on, while Sibyl pressed forward, determined to run the gantlet before her in spite of its dangers.

Of that daring race the reader is aware, for they saw a regiment of fathers lose their child and one man gain a daughter.

But, had Gold Spur seen this, too, bitter indeed, and sad, would have been his thoughts, as Featherhoof, wholly rested by his stop in the fort, fairly seemed to fly over the prairies.

As though he knew just how to direct his course, Gold Spur did not hesitate other than to draw his noble horse down to a swift canter,

which he knew he could keep up untiringly mile after mile.

If Colonel Eldred and his command had left their camp the night before, he knew that he would soon head them off; but if they had not broken up the encampment until dawn that morning, he would have a long ride before him.

And the latter he rather hoped for, as the nature of the country would enable the troopers to the better ambush the red-skin band of the Jackal on their retreat, which would be hurried, Gold Spur knew, as he already had premised their defeat at the garrison.

And thus mile after mile Featherhoof cast the miles behind him, his master drawing rein now and then for a swallow of water at some clear stream, and a moment of rest.

At length the shadows of horse and man began to lengthen far out upon the prairie, and at the speed he had come, Gold Spur knew he could not be far distant from the command, if they were coming by the trail he was following.

If they had taken another trail, when he reached the river he would discover it, and then following them, he could soon overtake them.

Presently the fringe of trees that bordered the river came in sight, with the wooded hills beyond, and just as the sun touched the horizon Gold Spur uttered a cry of joy, for far in the distance his quick eyes caught sight of the glitter of steel, and he knew that there was the regiment he sought.

The thought that when last among the troopers he had been a prisoner, that he had been called the White Jackal, and had shot The Hercules down in a duel, did not trouble him in the least, for he was a man to take all chances as they occurred, and meet them with a nerve and pluck that carried him through dangers that most others would succumb to.

"Come, Featherhoof, there is rest ahead," he said kindly to his horse, and slackening his pace, he held on for the distant hills.

A refreshing draught at the river, a walk of a mile, and the camp-fires were glimmering in the timbers near by.

Riding straight up to the sentinel, he answered the challenge with:

"Dispatches from the garrison for Colonel Eldred."

"Pass," said the sentry, not recognizing The Gentleman from Texas in the darkness, and he held on directly for the large camp-fire, which was pointed out to him as where the colonel could be found.

Around this fire, watching the colonel's negro servant, Moor, cook the evening meal, were the commandant himself, his daughter, Esther Gerard, Riley Rockwell, and several other officers.

Happy in having gained their object, the rescue of the maidens, the young officers were chatting gayly, when suddenly in their midst appeared the well-known form, which they so little expected to see.

Edna uttered a startled cry, which Esther Gerard echoed, as though they had seen a ghost, and up to their feet sprang the officers, the colonel included.

And there, calm, smiling, and with his splendid horse a few paces behind him, stood Gold Spur, who, seeing that all seemed too much amazed, even the commandant, to speak, said in his quiet way:

"Ladies, I am glad to see you looking so well; gentlemen, good-evening."

"You are indeed that remarkable man," and the colonel filled it out, while Gold Spur added:

"The Gentleman from Texas, yes, sir."

"In the name of Heaven! how came you here?"

"On horseback, as poor Featherhoof but too well knows."

"I deemed you in the lines of the enemy."

"On the contrary, Colonel Eldred, I have just left your lines."

"My lines, sir?"

"Yes, the garrison."

"That is impossible, sir; for at sunset last evening you were carried in irons to the Jackal chief; at least, so you said."

"And so I still say, sir; but I escaped, urged to make my escape sooner than I intended, to save your garrison, and I am glad to say I succeeded."

"Why, what service could you render the garrison, Sir Gold Spur?" asked the colonel, doubtfully.

"Save its inmates from death, sir," was the calm reply.

"It is more than you can do for yourself, accursed renegade!" cried a hoarse voice, and suddenly the tall form of The Hercules bounded into the open space, and leveling a revolver, fired full at the heart of The Gentleman from Texas, who beheld before him the man whom he had believed to be then lying in his grave.

CHAPTER XLIII.

A WOMAN'S LOVE.

WHEN Gold Spur discovered himself suddenly confronted by The Hercules, not in spirit form, but in real bone and sinew, he seemed to show no great surprise, but turned to him, just

in time to receive the fire which none had expected, and which fortunately missed its mark.

Back several steps the Texan moved, but recovering himself quickly, with the spring of a panther, was upon the large officer, and hurling him to the ground, had his foot on his throat in the twinkling of an eye.

"Were it not, sir, for the presence of these ladies, I would kill you," cried Gold Spur, and at his words, Edna Eldred cried:

"Oh, spare him, for he is crazed."

"Crazed!" and instantly Gold Spur stepped back, but The Hercules did not rise to his feet, but lay motionless.

"What! did you kill him?" asked Colonel Eldred.

"I certainly did not try to do so, sir; ha! he has fallen on his own knife, that he still holds in his hand, and which pierced his heart."

It was true, The Hercules's own knife had been driven into his heart.

"It is strange indeed, that he escaped death last night, for your bullet glanced on his skull, stunning and seeming to craze him, and to-night he falls by his own hand," said Riley Rockwell, and he called to some soldiers near by to remove the body, while Colonel Eldred turned to Gold Spur, and said sternly:

"Your presence, sir, seems always accompanied by some tragic act."

"Father, do not be unkind to one who yesterday offered himself as a sacrifice for Esther and I," cried Edna reproachfully.

"Not much of a sacrifice, when to-day we find him at liberty."

"Colonel Eldred, you find me at liberty, sir, because I won my freedom by killing my guards, and had I not been able to escape, the man in whose power I placed myself, would have put me to death."

"Do you mean this?" and Colonel Eldred asked the question earnestly.

"I do, sir; but to tell you why I escaped and why I am here," and The Gentleman from Texas went on to tell the story of his escape, his ride to the cliff cavern after Featherhoof, and his arrival at the garrison and the result.

Both the maidens, as well as the officers listened with rapt attention, and when Gold Spur had told why he had come in search of the troopers, Colonel Eldred held forth his hand, and said warmly:

"Gold Spur, I humbly ask you to forgive my cruel suspicions of you; but, with the exception of these ladies, Captain Rockwell, and several others, all have believed you really The White Jackal."

"Hold on, pard kernul, fer I wishes yer ter include me in ther gang as stuck up fer Texas since last night, an' I slings my fist towards him, 'cause I wants ter grip ther hand o' a man."

Gold Spur warmly grasped the hand of Buckskin Mose, and said, addressing all who stood near him, rather than any one in particular:

"I came up to this northern border to follow a trail I intend to run to the end, and my having aided Sergeant Sylvester to escape, for, not before last evening, did I believe him a guilty man, put me in ill-favor at the garrison."

"But now that you are willing to trust me, Colonel Eldred, permit me to suggest to you a plan to beat this Jackal chief and his allies?"

"Gladly will I do anything you may suggest, Gold Spur."

"Well, sir, they will come back to these mountains like whipped curs; at least the Jackal will, while Two Lance and the other Indian chiefs, will strike for their hunting-grounds and play honest Injun."

"To thoroughly defeat the Jackal, I with Mose and a few others will play Indian, and backed by Captain Rockwell and his men, we will pass the red-skin guards, enter the retreat, and annihilate his village."

"A good idea; but why not my whole command?"

"You, sir, with the larger force, can move at once for the Republican, and ambushing yourself at the ford, can attack them, on their retreat, and scatter them in small parties."

"To guard the ladies against danger, I will conduct them at once to a place of safety, and which but one other than myself knows of."

"And where is that?"

"The cavern of the one who is known as the Hermit of the Republican."

"Ah we will trust you fully, Gold Spur, so arrange your plans to suit yourself, and Captain Rockwell and Buckskin Mose will aid you in carrying them out."

"Thank you, Colonel Eldred; let our first duty be to bury poor Lieutenant Hale."

The proposal, coming from the man whom The Hercules had so hated, was felt by those who heard it, and the brother officers of the dead man hastened to perform this duty to the dead.

Then, leaving Captain Rockwell and his detachment to prepare for the work before them, Gold Spur led Colonel Eldred and the larger force, and which Edna and Esther accompanied to the river, and an hour after breaking camp, the two maidens were safely located in the Her-

mit's Cave, where they were provided with far more comforts than they had anticipated.

Leaving them there with the colonel's negro servant man as a protector, Gold Spur departed on his return to the command of Riley Rockwell, and shortly after midnight the troopers were on the march for the retreat of the Jackal and his band, and which was almost destitute of warriors.

Throwing around him the trappings of a chief, and with Buckskin Mose also thus rigged out, The Gentleman from Texas rode up to the Indian guard, to whose challenge he had responded in the Sioux tongue, and throwing himself upon the surprised warrior, a death struggle at once began, while the garrison guide sprung upon the other.

It was a short combat for life, and Gold Spur and Buckskin Mose were the victors, and the troopers moved slowly on into the interior of the hills.

Around the narrow shelf of rock where he had slain his guards, Gold Spur led the way, and soon after the glimmer of the camp-fires came in view, and like an avalanche the troopers charged upon them.

Wholly taken by surprise, the Indians were panic-stricken, and were shot and cut down in numbers, and ere long the soldiers held the village in triumph, and by the early light of dawn and the blazing cabins and tepees, began the search for booty.

Tired of carnage, Riley Rockwell was leaning against the deserted cabin of the Jackal chief when a form clad in white glided up behind him, and the arm was descending with sudden force, and in the hand was a long, narrow-bladed knife, seeking the heart of the young officer.

But ere the sharp point cut the cloth above his breast, there came a flash and report, and the intended assassin fell at the feet of the young officer, whom the shot suddenly aroused to the danger he had been in.

"Great God! it is a woman," he cried.

"Ay, and I sought to kill you, because you have brought ruin upon him I loved," she hissed savagely.

"And to you I owe my life, Gold Spur," and the captain stretched forth his hand, while the Texan replied:

"I was sorry to kill a woman, Rockwell, but it was her life or yours, and I know well the evil she has done."

"Who are you that professes to know me?" and the woman fixed her eyes, fast glazing in death, upon the Texan.

"I am Gold Spur, the Texan, and I am on the trail of—your lover."

A shriek burst from the woman's lips, and with that cry the life went from her body.

"Poor woman; you knew her then?" said Riley Rockwell.

"Yes; she loved the Jackal when she was a mere girl, and gave up all for him, clinging to him through all his crimes, until she became as vile as he is; but come, I have a surprise for you," and the Texan led the way toward another part of the village.

CHAPTER XLIII.

THE SURPRISE.

SILENTLY following the Texan, Captain Riley Rockwell soon came upon a cabin built against the steep side of the hill.

It was a cabin built of the stoutest logs, and it was the entrance to what the Jackal chief called his Death Cavern.

And there, seated in the entrance to the cave, in double irons and his face haggard and emaciated sat a man half clothed.

"Great God! it is Sergeant Sylvester!"

The cry broke from the lips of the young officer, and Gold Spur said:

"Yes, it is Sergeant Sylvester."

"But only the evening before alive and well he delivered up the Jackal's captives in exchange for you, Gold Spur."

"No, no, captain, there is some sad mistake here; but come, let us get off, for as we have wiped out the retreat, we may arrive in time to join the colonel in his ambush," and taking a bunch of keys from the girdle of a dead white renegade, the guard of the Death Cavern, Gold Spur quickly unlocked the irons that bound the wrists and ankles of Sergeant Sylvester, and aided him to mount a cavalry horse.

Shortly after the troopers set forth upon their return, anxious to join in the combat at the ford; but, ere they got within a dozen miles of the river, they heard the firing of their comrades, and knew that the battle had begun.

Pressing forward with all haste, they hoped to get in at the end, but were again disappointed, for the firing ceased when they were yet a mile away, and upon reaching the scene of conflict they found that their comrades had done their work well, for the retreating Indians had been taken wholly by surprise, and had been shot down by the score.

"Gold Spur, we owe this glorious battle to you," cried Colonel Eldred with enthusiasm, "but there is one great drawback, in fact two."

"And what are those, colonel?"

"The Jackal chief escaped, for he is not among the dead or wounded, and so did that

arch deserter, Sergeant Sylvester, whom I saw fighting like a very demon."

"No, Colonel Eldred, you did not see me there, sir."

It was the sergeant himself who spoke, and the colonel stood like one dazed; but before he could speak in reply, Gold Spur cried:

"You say the chief escaped?"

"Yes."

"Then come with me, and this mystery shall be solved."

Away rode the Texan, and close behind him followed Colonel Eldred, Captain Rockwell, Lieutenant Emmerson, the sergeant and Buckskin Mose.

A rapid ride of fifteen minutes, brought them to the mountain range, which has before been described as seemingly cut in twain by the river, and dismounting, the Texan led the way up the steep path, and bounded into the cavern.

As he did so, a man fell at his feet, and over him bent the athletic form of Moor the servant of Colonel Eldred, and who said, in seeing the Texan enter, and the others behind him:

"Ah! I got him, sure! he came in with Missy Sibyl in his arms, and were goin' ter run this cave, but I guesses not, and so we hitched, and he hev got my knife, hallelujah!"

"Curses on your black soul, this wound is fatal," groaned the prostrate man.

"Yes, it is fatal, Moline, the Prairie Serpent, White Jackal, and devil incarnate; if it were not, I would kill you now, as I would a snake," and Gold Spur bent over the prostrate man, who cried savagely:

"Ha! we have again met, and you escape me; ay, live to see me die."

"Yes, Moline, as I saw Lela, the Mexican die, the woman you so wronged, and who became vile like you."

"Lela dead!" and he spoke in a whisper.

"Yes, I killed her to save the life of a noble man."

"Then are you avenged, Herbert Hillary," said the Jackal chief.

"Yes, I am avenged for the murder of my wife and child, and burning of my house, when, as the Prairie Serpent, you came and did me those cruel wrongs, that set me as a hound upon your track."

"I drove you from Texas, Moline, and I followed you here, and in my disguise of an old Hermit, I have been plotting a sweet revenge on you, and death has cheated me; but I am content, I am content."

Gold Spur arose, for he had knelt by the dying man, and stood with folded arms looking down upon the Jackal.

It was a thrilling scene there in that cavern; the Jackal lying upon the rocky floor; Moor, the negro who had given him his death-wound standing at his head; back in the cave crouched three forms, gazing in silent awe upon the scene; and in the front stood Colonel Eldred, Riley Rockwell, Buckskin Mose, Lieutenant Emmerson and the sergeant.

Presently the latter stepped forward and laid his hand upon the arm of the Texan, while he said quietly:

"He called you Herbert Hillary?"

"Yes, such is my name."

"You had a sister?"

"Yes, Blanche; she married when I was a middy at sea."

"She married me."

"I know it."

"And I have to ask you to forgive a wrong in the past?"

"It is forgiven; you had never met me, and I was believed lost at sea, and returning home and seeing my sister with her arms around my neck, for I had just returned home, in a frenzy of jealous rage you shot me and fled."

"You believed you had killed me, and became a murderer; but I recovered, gave up the life of a sailor, to become a Texas ranchero, and that man wrecked my life."

"Alas! that he too should have wronged you, for he is my twin brother."

All started at this announcement, while a smothered cry came from the back part of the cave.

"Yes, my twin brother, who, from earliest boyhood was a wild, sinful fellow, and brought me into all kinds of scrapes that brought sorrow in later years."

"Loving him as I did, he also possessed an influence over me which I could not shake off, and, knowing that I was engaged to your sister, whom he also loved, he made me swear to sell my very soul to him, at his will, under pain of telling her that I, not he, was guilty of many crimes that had lately shocked the community."

"It was his secret call, the cry of the whip-o-will that made me leave the bivouac that night, and he it was that forced me between two warriors, to carry me into the attack on the train, and that I would not betray him, preferring death, you all know."

"But when I went to him, after my escape, and begged that he should free me from my oaths that bound me to his will, he threw me in his prison cave, and doomed me to a living death."

"Speak, now, Moline Sylvester, and say if I speak the truth?"

"Yes," came in a firm tone from the pallid lips.

"Am I a deserter, a renegade or the guilty man you would have made me?"

"No!"

"Thank God! now I can find happiness in the love of my child, your sister's child, sir," and the sergeant turned to Herbert Hillary, the Texan, who answered, firmly:

"And I shall find in Sibyl more than a niece, for she shall be a sister to me— Hal the Jackal—I mean your brother, is dead."

The head of the crime-stained man had suddenly fallen back, and his eyes had become fixed in the stare of death.

For a moment a deathlike silence reigned, and then a slender form crept from the darkness at the back part of the cave, and threw herself in the arms of her father.

"Father, forgive him now, for he is your own kindred, and he is dead."

"He was wicked, I know, and I sought him in my run back to the fort, believing him to be you, for you are so much alike, and he cursed me and my poor mother, but I forgive him now."

"And I, too, forgive him, Sibyl," and kneeling, the sergeant placed his hand upon the upturned forehead of his brother.

"Sylvester, and I, too, ask you to forgive me, for I doubted you; but the scales have fallen from my eyes, and I will atone all in my power for the wrong done you," and Colonel Eldred's voice trembled as he spoke, and one by one the others came forward, and a smile of joy came over the face of the sergeant, when he felt he was no longer looked upon as a dishonored man.

In the cavern where he fell Moline Sylvester, the Jackal chief, was buried, and then the party set forth for the garrison, where they were welcomed with wild hurrahs by the soldiers, to whom Buckskin Mose, who went on ahead with dispatches, had retailed the entire news to most willing ears, and made Herbert Hillary, the Texan, the hero of heroes, and at the same time did not neglect to throw in a kind word for the sergeant, that won for him a warm reception from his companions in arms, who felt ashamed of their doubts of him.

CHAPTER XLIV.

WEAK AND WICKED.

It was the day after the arrival of Colonel Eldred and his command in the garrison, and that officer was seated in his private office meditating complacently over the renown he would win, not to speak of promotion, for having so thoroughly ended the outlaw and Indian war upon the border.

Presently a knock came at the door, and Herbert Hillary, long known as Gold Spur, The Gentleman from Texas, entered.

"Well, my friend, I am delighted to see you, and if they have men like you in your State, I shall always go out of my way to meet a Gentleman from Texas; but be seated, and tell me how I can serve you."

"I asked for this interview, Colonel Eldred, to say to you that though the Serpent and Jackal have been annihilated on the prairie and in the mountains, there is one in this garrison I deem it my duty to tell you is a most dangerous person."

"Indeed! you surprise me, Hillary; who is he?"

"It is a woman, not a man, sir."

"I am amazed! a woman in this garrison, one of my military family, a snake in the grass?"

"Yes, colonel, she is just that, where her sister was an angel."

"A strange kindred."

"True, sir, yet such was the case, as her sister was my wife."

"Your wife?"

"Yes, whom Moline Sylvester, then known as the Prairie Serpent of Texas, killed with our child one night in robbing my house when I was absent."

"The woman I refer to made gold her idol, and knowing that I had a large sum of money in the house, she plotted with this guerrilla chief to rob me and share the booty with him."

"She was in the house the night of the robbery, but my wife was a brave woman, and resisted, shooting two of the outlaws, and for it she was shot down, and another shot killed our little girl."

"This the treacherous sister had not bargained for, and she refused to touch the gold, and the Prairie Serpent got it all."

"Through a long attack of fever, brought on by her own act of treachery, I nursed the woman, and her own tongue betrayed all in her delirium to me, and I afterward found out that she told the truth, and thus we parted."

"Rising from her sick bed more beautiful than ever, she inveigled a youth into marrying her, expecting him to one day be rich; but the will of his uncle cut him out, it seems, and yet she so worded it, erasing what she did not like, and making her husband put in what she did want, that he got the fortune."

"This she got from him, in less than six months, and in despair he entered the army from a civil life appointment, and they parted."

"But she continued her wild life, ran through with her fortune, and only lately finding out where her husband was, visited him, for she has her eye upon a wealthy young officer."

"But she is already married."

"That is nothing to her; she will marry again, for her husband is known as her brother, and he dare not say to the contrary if she says nay."

"Great God! you refer to Lieutenant Emerson and Mrs. Conrad," said the colonel in a whisper.

"I do, sir."

"Poor boy; he seems a good fellow."

"And is, only she has wrecked his life, and made him sin about that will, yet he got none of the riches, so I beg you not to betray him in this matter."

"I will not, for I like Emerson; but she must go."

"Assuredly, for she was the spy, here in the garrison, of the Jackal chief."

"Good heavens! I will arrest her—"

"No, colonel, only send for her, and let me bid her go."

The colonel did send for the widow, and she swept into the room, in all her queenly beauty.

"Madam, whatever Mr. Herbert Hillary says to you I indorse," he said, sternly, and the widow turned pale.

"I have only to say, Clarice, that you go at once from this garrison, and if I hear of you again in public life, and I shall watch for you, I shall arrest you for bigamy and murder, both which charges I can prove."

"There is a train starting East in the morning, so take that, and mind you, not an unkind word to the poor boy whose life you made wretched: go!"

Without a word, but as livid as a corpse, the woman left the room, and too proud to live in poverty with crime pressing her conscience down, one month after she was found dead in her room in a hotel and her own hand had taken her life.

CONCLUSION.

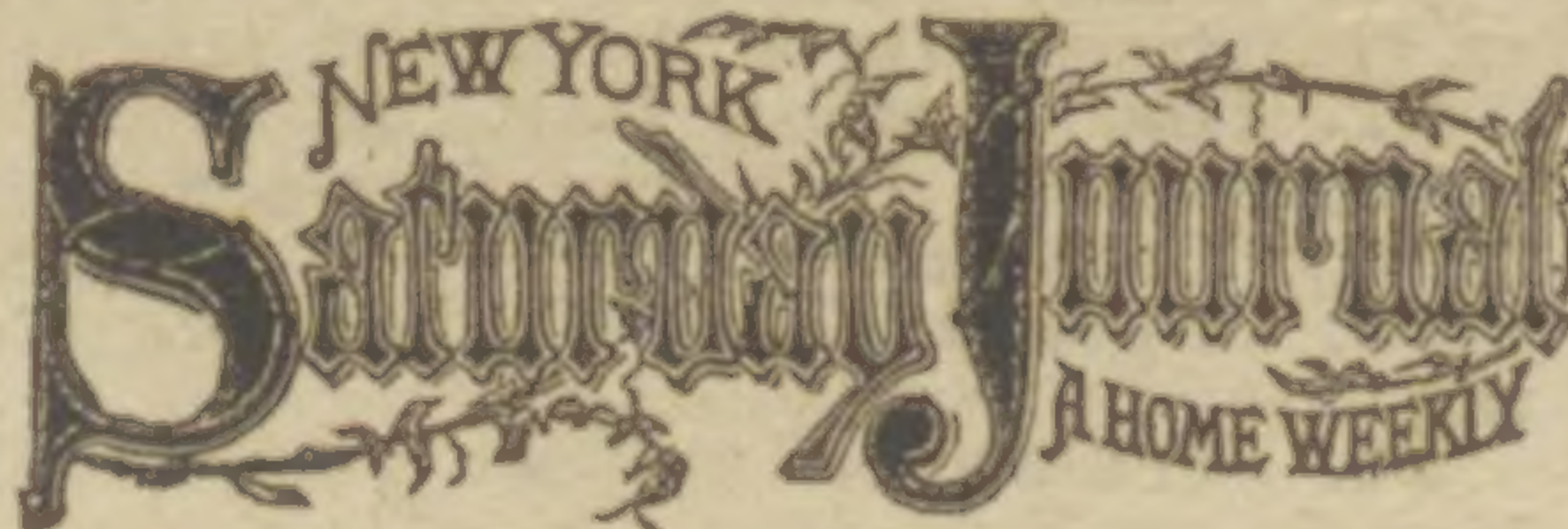
Kind reader, the ruins alone stand of the old frontier garrison, and yet the spot remains green in the memory of many who figured there in the scenes of long ago.

In that garrison there were three weddings, binding in indissoluble bonds Esther Gerard to the colonel commandant, thereby making her the sweet mother-in-law of Herbert Hillary, once known as Gold Spur, The Gentleman from Texas, who married Edna Eldred, and a more thorough love-match was never made.

The other couple who consented to journey along life's rugged pathway together, was Captain Riley Rockwell, and Sibyl, and he won the everlasting enmity of the young officers for stealing from them, as they called it, the idol of the garrison, better known as the Child of the Regiment.

Sergeant Sylvester, with the cloud lifted from his life, left the army, and went to stock raising, and now is known as one of the cattle kings of Nebraska, and his partner is Major Giles Gregory, now known as the general; while their most frequent visitor is Buckskin Mose, who never tires of going over old trails in which the hero was The Gentleman from Texas.

THE END.



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